# TransSisters

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The Journal of Transsexual Feminism

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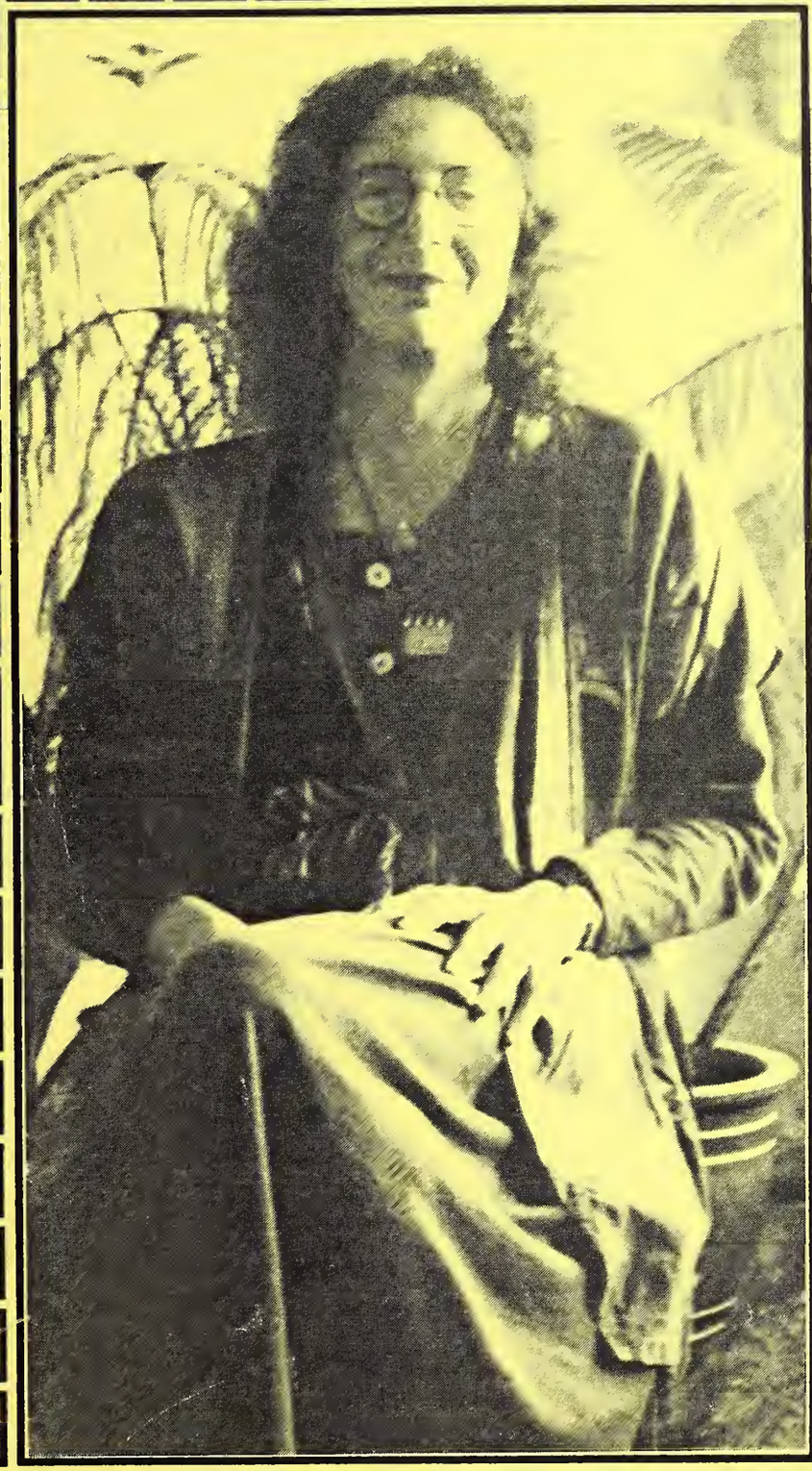

# THE POWER AND THE PASSION: AN INTERVIEW WITH RACHEL POLLACK

Plus:

Archetypal Transsexuality

The Suffering Behind Premarin

Minnie Bruce Pratt's *S/he*

Overcoming the Stigma of Disability

Meet the New Boss, Same As the Old Boss

and more

# TransSisters

## The Journal of Transsexual Feminism

4004 Troost Avenue
Kansas City, Missouri 64110
(816) 753-7816
davinaanne@aol.com



**Publisher / Editor:**
Davina Anne Gabriel

**Staff Writers:**
Christine Beatty
Renee Chinquapin
Adrienne Davis
Dallas Denny
Davina Anne Gabriel
Rachel Pollack
Mustang Sally

**Staff Cartoonist:**
Diana Green

**Contributing Writers This Issue:**
Kristine Wyonna Holt
Bonnie Stoehn


Cover photo: Rachel Grace Pollack; photo by Helle Agathe Beierholm

# Statement of Purpose

**In recognition of the fact that transsexual persons have been systematically silenced, marginalized, maligned and even brutalized, not only within mainstream society, but also even within feminist philosophy and culture,**

***TransSisters: the Journal of Transsexual Feminism* has been created to further the process of defining ourselves and creating our own reality, rather than allowing others to do so.**

**As such, *Transsisters* is committed toward accomplishing the following objectives:**

**1.) to providing a forum dealing specifically with issues of transsexuality from a feminist perspective;**

**2.) to giving voice to the ideas, feelings, concerns and perspectives of transsexual feminists;**

**3.) to ending the misperception that transsexuality and feminism are antithetical;**

**4.) to ending the invisibility and marginalization of transsexual persons within the feminist community;**

**5.) to fostering understanding of the phenomenon of transsexuality among nontranssexual feminists;**

**6.) to promoting dialogue, understanding, cooperation and reconciliation between the feminist and transsexual communities;**

**7.) to promoting feminist consciousness within the transsexual community;**

**8.) to promoting honest examination of the complex issues which affect the lives of transsexual persons in a constructive, non-dogmatic manner within a feminist context leading to the empowerment of transsexual persons through feminist principles.**

**Although the primary focus of *TransSisters* is on issues of concern to male-to-female transsexuals, issues of concern to female-to-male transsexuals are also relevant to its purpose.**


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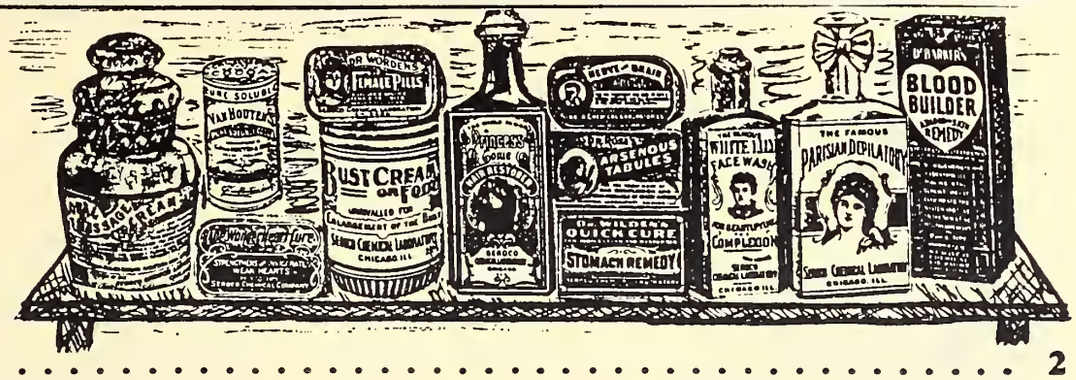
# Table of Contents




**Letters to the Editor** . . . . . 2
**Trans-Action News** . . . . . 8
**Telling Our Stories: Our Own Personal Wrinkle** *by Renée Chinquapin* . . . . . 13
**The Suffering Behind Premarin** *by Bonnie Stoehn* . . . . . 14
**The Disability Initiative** *by Kristine Wyonna Holt* . . . . . 16
**S/he Who** *by Mustang Sally* . . . . . 20
**Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss** *by Davina Anne Gabriel* . . . . . 22
**Unquestionably Fine by** *Davina Anne Gabriel* . . . . . 31
**Archetypal Transsexuality** *by Rachel Pollack* . . . . . 39
**A Tarot Reading In Honor of Davina Anne Gabriel** *by Rachel Pollack* . . . . . 42
**The Power and the Passion: An Interview with Rachel Pollack** *by Davina Anne Gabriel* . . . 44
**Rachel Pollack Bibliography** . . . . . 64
**The Cure** *by Diana Green* . . . . . 66

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**COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF TransSisters: the Journal of Transsexual Feminism:**

**Transsexual Womyn at the 1995 Michigan Womyn's Music Festival**

# Letters to the Editor

Davina Anne Gabriel
*TransSisters*:

I sent for and received the latest issue of *TransSisters* which was somewhat interesting. I'll probably get more than a few "dirty looks" for my comments but ... I find that a lot of energy is going into fighting those lesbian groups, who for whatever reason, do not want us girls (I have been post-op for some years) with them. I ran into that in Seattle when I attended a group meeting and they had a rep from a local group there. I made the mistake of asking a few questions and when I called up later, she knew who I was and said no. There was no reason given but obviously we are contaminated. I have my own theories but it goes into psychology and I think some of them would run from that because they would have to face some truths that may hurt. In any event, I knew I was above that class of thought (or people) but knew that not all gays and lesbians agree with that exclusion idea, I went on to other things.

I do not consider myself to be either post-op or a transsexual woman. I was and am a woman, period, but at the time I was still looking for an identity -- I wasn't sure if I was lesbian or not. I dated a few men and was nothing more than the lady they wanted to be with. I eventually ran into a man who got serious (yes, I had gone to bed with a few men and enjoyed it -- perhaps in that time frame I realized my orientation had changed also) and who wanted to be with me. Thru discussions and other things, he came to realize my history which made no difference. We were married a few years ago and now have two children (I am blessed with a fine son and a daughter who plans to follow her mother -- yes, my daughter is TS).

I have digressed a bit -- I find a lot of space is given to the effort of fighting that exclusion policy. What thoughts brought that whole matter up is questionable though I agree that women are not born, they develop and from what I've read, some of those persons wouldn't make that class in a wish. I would think that perhaps some women who are post-op might rise above that class and not give that group the satisfaction. That group is thriving on the publicity and your efforts. Even if the rule is changed, some people won't change their attitudes. I wouldn't want to be around that. Perhaps a better use of energy would be to cover issues facing women as a whole and maybe those that face TS persons.

Again I'll get some dirty looks but I just wonder if some women want to wave the fact they're lesbian and TS like a banner. I know many that prefer to fade into the background and just be women going about their business. There's a few like me who have been blessed with a family, a job and just want to be treated like any other woman. Granted we're 2nd. class citizens but that's slowly changing. I am just a woman with a husband, children and grandchildren. I also have the chance to help my daughter find her life.

Davina -- I have noticed (and this is based on the one issue that I have) that while *TransSisters* does cover a number of TS events and issues, it seems that the overall picture is slanted towards lesbian-oriented issues. I guess I was expecting information not only about transsexualism but many of the trials we face, the frustrations we meet, etc.but on a neutral plane.

The article by Mustang Sally was interesting because she brought out a few issues that should be covered. The fact that 'transgender' is being used to cover a number of gender-based issues and people that is improper. Some people say that surgery doesn't change a thing, that it's not necessary, etc. An inaccurate statement. Gays and lesbians have their own particular labels. Homosexual is the general label that doesn't completely identify a person. Transgender does a worse job. While Homosexual, gay and lesbian all deal with one-sex issues, transgender seeks to cover persons who are either crossdressers (I prefer transvestite), those wanting to live-as, and those who want to 'be' men or women. There is a vast difference in those classes. Transvestites will be those who want to dress and act as men or women for the moment but after a while go back to their 'usual selves.' Not many really care enough to learn to 'be' and try to be accepted as the other. These persons usually are content just to dress as and maybe 'affect' some mannerisms. While they want to be accepted, they have only a bare conception of what it is like to 'be' and relate to another. They come across as one trying to be another. This is a far cry from 'live-as'. These persons usually try to 'become' the other, to relate to, be accepted as and usually become almost. Here is where my understanding fails. Were I to 'live-as', why would I want to keep something that obviously doesn't belong. Were I a woman who wanted to live as a man, knowing the state of surgical advances and expenses, keeping the genital area might be far more practical and something that just has to be. Were I a man to live as a woman (more common), I cannot understand why I would want to keep a penis. To have it as a safety net? That doesn't make sense because if you're going to "live-as", the person has made a fair amount of permanent changes to their body that would become 'habituated' to being a man or woman and that isn't something you can just turn on and off. Speaking for me, I had to be a complete woman (as much as possible) because I also have a sexual self to be considered and having something there in the way would be counter to being a woman. Keeping anything wasn't even choice nor did I have any doubt of choice. Some would say that I still have a penis but inverted. Not true! A penis is an organ that has some muscle, some erectile tissue, nerves, a urethra, and the back part has connections for reproduction. By themselves they make up nothing but as the whole it is a penis. All I have is a piece of skin that makes up my vagina that's no different from any older woman who's had a hysterectomy. It's also in a different location from that of a penis. The nerves make up what might be called a circumcised

clitoris. The rest of me is no different. I don't have any of the so-called 'penis equipment'. I have been a woman for some time, I don't even know how to act as a man nor would I want to. I'm very happy being a woman, wife and mother (and grandmother).

Davina -- I give you permission to use my name and address if you wish. I am sure that a few women will find enough wrong about my opinions (like I shouldn't have any) to let me know about it. No need for you to get burned also.

Mrs. Sheila Emery,
Lynwood, Washington

Dear Davina,

I recently discovered *TransSisters* only three weeks ago, upon meeting the only other (acknowledged) transsexual I'd ever met. Before then, I was nearly certain that I was the only one in Tulsa, even though my therapist assured me that that was not the case. But I figured that even if there were others out there, they were somehow unobtainable to me, or would be unwilling (understandably, in Tulsa, Oklahoma) to reveal themselves. When I graduated from high school I went on a frantic, lonely, and perhaps dangerously unsupervised search for a solution to that all-too-familiar dilemma of the transsexual: being perceived a man, but feeling myself to be a woman. I have experimented and researched and experimented some more in the process. I have tried everything from herbal estrogen therapy, to my best friend's birth-control pills, to black market estrogens. However, it proved to be far too difficult (and expensive!) an undertaking to grope blindly as I was doing. For fear of my health, I broke down and consulted a a battery of psycho- logists who either looked at me in disgusted awe or patronized me with routine questions about my "troubled" family life. I finally discovered a sympathetic therapist who has offered me some guidance down this difficult path. I am now a 20 year old college senior and I have just begun my "legitimate" hormonal therapy. And thanks to the support offered by my newfound transsexual friends and the inspiring *TransSisters* I feel that I finally have a future that looks bright. Although I would still be seeing my therapist had I not come across your excellent journal, it helps to know that there is an entire, viable community of similar souls out there who know what I'm going through and have made happy and fulfilling lives for themselves after all. I am no longer resigned to a life of paranoia and self-pity. I now have more guidance on my journey than the network talk-shows, with their vulgar exploitation of the very real pain of the transgendered. I cannot thank you enough for *TransSisters*. For once I feel like I do exist and that my efforts are not in vain. Your journal has offered me, and I'm certain many more like me, a sense of hope for the future and a greater confidence in myself as a person (soon, a WOMAN!!) and not just as an "aberration." In no uncertain terms, you have SAVED MY LIFE!

Thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you.

June Monroe Polk
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dear Davina,

In my letter published in the last issue of *TransSisters*, I asked other supporters of transgender liberation who do not personally identify as transgendered to contact me via the Internet, but the address I gave is inaccurate. My correct e-mail address is StrongFem@aol.com. I am interested in networking with anyone who is transgendered and/or into gender issues. I am a femme who wants to change the world.

Sue Reed,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dear Davina,

Enclosed is a money order for twenty-five dollars ($25.00) U.S. funds for a one-year subscription to *TransSisters*.

To introduce myself, my name is Murray James Griffith and I was born a mere male on April 16, 1932. I was born a genetic male, and being a mere male, I am happy to be one. The dictionary defines *mere* this way: "being only this and nothing else." I have noticed that not everyone feels this way. Transsexuals certainly don't. I know many people feel that it is wrong to change sex and as a result do not have any respect for transsexuals.

For the last three years I have received a lot of information on transsexualism. I have learned much from Ms. Abby M. Greene, *TV-TS Confidential* magazine editor, and through corresponding with TSs. This February, I had the great pleasure of meeting my first post-op M2F transsexual. I regard this meeting as the greatest happening of my life. From this, I have greater respect for transsexuals.

Ms. Dallas Denny sent me issue # 5 of *TransSisters* magazine and I thoroughly enjoyed it. For this reason, I am subscribing to your wonderful magazine.

Well, this give you an idea of what I am like. I will close by saying, "Let us love one another regardless of what we are: men, women, pre-op or post-op transsexuals. Let us get along with everyone." I certainly do my best to follow this motto throughout life.

Sincerely,
Murray Griffith

Dear Davina,

I agree with your stated position on inclusion/exclusion at the New Woman Conference (Rite of Passage). I feel that many of your correspondents who find fault with the policy are writing from purely a philosophical perspective on the issue. As a feminist lesbian transsexual woman who has attended the last two NWCs, I am not surprised that the vote each time has been unanimous to retain the present postoperative policy. One must only experience the weekend to see just how inappropriate the inclusion of preoperative women would be. One of the more vocal critics of the policy to be published in *TransSisters* attended NWC two years ago, and thought the policy was good enough to join in the unanimous vote. So perhaps there is a "magic" afoot? Hmmm...In my case, the "penis monster" is a big deal. I don't want to have to deal with it in the second half of my life, thank

you.

Keep up the great work on your 'zine, Davina. I love it!

Lori Killough
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Madame Editor:

Thank you for the subscription. I appreciate your magazine and the forum; even if I strongly disagree with some of your points-of-view, and/or the points-of-view expressed by some of your readers. *"Je déteste ce que vous dizes mais je défendrai votre droit a le dire,"* said Voltaire. It is a sign of journalistic integrity to print opposing viewpoints.

I appreciated the article on Susan Davis. Her struggle and pain touch my heart. Long have I been concerned about the plight of our sisters and brothers in the sex industry and transgendered prisoners.

I would like to see more coverage on transgendered sex workers; it is an important area largely uncovered by the mainstream gender press. For the past eleven years I have provided counselling, survival information and referrals to sex workers and other members of our community living in poverty. In my opinion transgendered sex workers and our sisters and brothers living in neighborhoods like San Francisco's Tenderloin district, are the most disenfranchised members of our community. Indeed, I have done sex work myself several times in my life, so I believe I know whereof I speak. Ms. Davis deserves and needs our support and love; her struggle is our struggle. The justice she fights for will help many others. She is a strong, powerful woman, but she cannot do it alone. Keep the faith, sister, our hearts and minds are with you, even if our bodies can't be.

So the Michigan struggle continues. I don't wish to sound overly negative, but personally, I think it's a waste of time, energy and money. There are many more important issues that we should address. It may be fun and sexy to run off to the country, go topless for a few days and play activist, but it doesn't win us any rights. It doesn't help people like Susan Davis and Dee Farmer. One asks what is to be accomplished in Michigan that will benefit the community as a whole?

Will gaining access to Michigan help one single transsexual get surgery or hormones? Has the Michigan struggle so far helped anyone win a lawsuit to gain employment rights, like Kristine Holt of Pennsylvania? How, may I ask, has the protest at Michigan helped one transgendered person (trans if you prefer) keep from being homeless, gain access to a shelter, prevented one single transgendered woman to survive domestic violence? In my view, issues such as access to chemical dependence treatment, police harassment, HIV/AIDS, psychiatric abuse/torture, the right to change one's name/birth certificate/military/school records, etc., racism and poverty, immigration rights and the list goes on, are far more important than a weekend of fun and sun in the country, while not but a few kilometers from where many of the activists live and work, our sisters and brothers are dying. LITERALLY. Instead of spending nearly a thousand dollars to go to Michigan, they could donate that money to an organization like the Filisa Vistima Foundation to help fight for the right of transsexuals to get surgery through their insurance plans. Margaret O'Hartigan may be controversial; indeed, I certainly don't always agree with her actions but with her foundation, at least she's doing something to help people to get surgery.

J'ACCUSE. J'accuse the activist community of ignoring the real needs of our community while focusing on easy, soft, sexy, fun activities. J'accuse them of bourgeois elitism, never venturing out from their cozy, safe, middle-class environments to tackle the real issues.

J'ACCUSE the Transgender Community as a whole of ignoring the needs of the poorest and most disenfranchised members of our community to focus on easy, soft, fluffy issues.

J'ACCUSE the community as a whole, transsexuals, transgenderists, cross-dressers, gender-benders, etc. of ignorance and neglect in dealing with the real, substantive issues: AIDS/HIV, domestic violence, criminal justice, transgendered people in prison, homelessness, racism, poverty, access to medical care, psychological care, chemical dependence treatment, psychiatric abuse, torture of transsexual/transgendered young people, and a host of other major social issues.

While people waste time and ink arguing about what to be called, our sisters, brothers, daughters and sons in the community are getting killed, are dying of AIDS, are being denied medical care, housing, police services, rotting in jail, etc. What cares the basher whether we call ourselves transgendered, transsexual or what? He doesn't stop to ask, "Pardon me, but before I kill you, I'd just like to know, do you identify as trans, transgendered, transsexual, or are you pre-, post-, or non-op? Do you identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual? Or are you hetero-identified? It's for my records you understand, and your cooperation is much appreciated." To him, we're all to queer to live.

From where I stand, I'm more worried about Herr Gingrich's Contract with America than whether I or anyone else gets into Michigan or similar events. Jesse Helms wants to round us all up and put us in AIDS concentration camps. Does the sound of President Phil Gramm, Robert Dole or Pat Robertson scare you? Lest one say I'm overreacting, let us not forget that these people have MONEY and the Left thought Adolf Hitler was too looney to get elected. I already smell the smoke of the *auto-da-fés*.

In Latin America, our sisters and brothers are being assassinated by U.S. sponsored and trained death squads. Meanwhile, some of our community members are jumping on the anti-immigration bandwagon with their own shrill cries of *"Amerika über Alles!"*

The recent bombing in Oklahoma should send some serious chills down our collective spines because of its ramifications for civil rights. President Clinton has already called for a broadening of police powers. Many of us remember the FBI's COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program) which trampled on civil liberties and spied on any group it deemed subversive. Shades of Kristalnacht! While we argue over petty issues the right-wing is targeting us by name; anti-queer legislation has arisen in Montana, Idaho, Washington and elsewhither that specifically names trans-folk in it, to prevent us from changing birth-certificates, i.d., getting surgery through the state medical

plan, etc. *"Vanitas Vanifarum,"* saith the Prophet, all is vanity.

This letter is a call to arms. *Aux barricades! Aux armes!* Our community, as all progressive, positive, forward-looking peoples is under attack. While we stand around bickering about what to call ourselves, and activists dine on steak and wine, Jesse Helms wants to lock us all up in AIDS concentration camps. Davina talks about jackboots, but they're really going to come from Pat Robertson, Phil Gramm and Pat Buchannan, not from other transies. They don't distinguish fundamentally between cross-dressing, transsexuals, transgenderists or drag queens. We're all too queer to live to them. If we don't wake up and organize, we're headed for the 1950s, lily-white, suburban brave new world that they envision. In that vision for Amerika, there is no place for transies, gays, lesbians, Jews, blacks or anyone else who isn't white, Anglo-Saxon, male, Kristian and above all else, heterosexual. "When they came for the Jews, I said nothing . . . When they came for me, there was no one left to speak for me."

In other areas, I really appreciated and enjoyed Davina's interview with Sandy Stone. She was an early light for me. She and Mustang Sally were early lights for me as a young, aspiring transsexual lesbian, priestess-anarchasyndicalist in the Haight-Ashbury in 1980. They showed me possibilities and gave me the inspiration and courage to succeed in all my aspirations, particularly Sandy. I was struggling to achieve my identity and keep a roof over my head. Reading J.R.'s diatribe strengthened the resolve within me to keep struggling; if Sandy Stone could do it, then maybe I could. If Mustang Sally could be successful then perhaps it was a possibility for me. Reading Jaundiced Realman's (thanks for that name M.S.) hate piece angered me, and inspired me to action. Sandy and M.S. were real cultural heraines to me. Sandy is a foremother and crone we can all look up to.

Sandy is an articulate and important voice because of the history she has been a part of and her impressive accomplishments. People like her and Susan Stryker of Oakland do a tremendous amount of good for us all by being open in their academic statuses. They provide a healthy antidote to the pseudo-scholasticism of Nazis in feminist drag like Raymond or inaccurate conclusions based on inaccurate premises such as Lisa Rose pointed out about Sandra Bem. Where Raymond and Bem draw global conclusions based on tiny population samples, Sandy's work is based on solid academic discipline, personal knowledge and large population samples as well as longitudinal studies. Sandy and Susan provide healthy foils to the transphobic theories of Walker, Stoller, Money. et. al.

As a counsellor/social worker who has provided counselling, survival and other services to our community for the past eleven years, I appreciated Sandy's comments about passing and not baring our souls too quickly. I counsel people regularly to integrate their past histories with their present lives. Renée Chinquapin refers to the same idea when she talks about letting her "(male) persona [(the Latin word for mask)] dissolve into that of her (female) anima [(Latin for soul)]." I've had ftms who emulated the worst characteristics of machismo, strutting around like cocks-on-the-walk, in military fatigues, with big knives on their belts and even bigger blocks of granite on their shoulders or conversely, ultra-feminine mtfs mincing about in nothing but skirts and dresses, with three inch nails & heels and makeup by Sherwin-Williams (applied with a trowel). A lot of us have gone through this as a developmental stage, but some have gotten stuck in this head-space.

The caution against baring one's soul is a practical one that will save many a transie from heartbreak or worse, homelessness, violence, unemployment or even death. Goddess Cybele's blessing on her for that advice, truly worthy of a Crone.

Finally, welcome Adrienne, I read your article with delight. Your's is a solid, well-written, thoughtful perspective of a young African-American transsexual lesbian that has been sorely missing from the overwhelmingly white, middle-class gender press. Your son should be proud to have a parent who is not only as beautiful as you but such a profound thinker and excellent writer.

In the struggle,
Christine Tayleur,
San Francisco, California

Dear Davina,

Thank you so much! Now I understand there is another approach to transsexualism other than dressing up as a bimbo with big tits and ass.

Even though I am pessimistic of us ever being fully accepted by both the straight and lesbian communities, your work is still invaluable. So keep it up!

Thanks again,
E. Chan
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Dear Davina,

Enough is enough. As if we don't have more important things to argue about. Judging from the last few issues of *TransSisters*, some of us (too many for me) are bent on the interjection of their identity politics onto center stage, using each other as comparative targets for our own sense of political correctness. Our vehement disagreements over our identity politics are draining our energies from more serious issues like obtaining protection from employment discrimination, the continued practice and affordability of SRS in this country, getting us out of the DSM-IV, and fighting transphobia. Too many of us are fiddling while Rome burns. First NWC preoperative inclusion, now this, soon to be followed by the exclusion of pre-op women at Michigan from our protest over our own exclusion by MWMF! By creating these divisions we are trivializing ourselves and our movement in our self-obsession, which amounts to fighting over the arrangement of deck chairs on the Titanic. The trashing that's happening is positively disgusting, and similar attacks have already both polluted and diluted the larger women's movement. Is transsexual feminism doomed to repeat the same mistakes of its nontranssexual predecessor?

For those of us who have problems with it, try looking at the term "transgender" as in *trans*-cendence. By my refusal to accept my body-sex/gender-mind discongruency, I *trans*cend my

feelings of unworthiness. By undergoing sex reassignment surgery, I transcend the sex and gender given to me by nature. By outing myself when the situation allows, I *trans*cend the nons' bipolar conceptualization of gender and sex, showing that it is indeed mutable. By my existence alone, I am *trans*cending the patriarchy's rigid gender caste system. By my refusal to die or disappear, I am transcending those who hate me, including other women so horribly abused by men that they cannot deal with the impossibility of me, let alone me being with them in our space together. Their separatism has reduced them to the acceptance of "biology as destiny," and yet they still can discuss "gender oppression?" Transsexuals embody resistance to gender oppression, because of our partial *trans*cendence of it. I say partial because many more than we are gender-oppressed as well, and there is much more work to be done.

Surrounded on all sides by hatred, must we foster horizontal hostility within our tiny community as well? Like every other person born differently gendered, I too suffer from internalized transphobia, and once I too allowed it to surface by attacking others in my community for my perception of their lack of perfection. But no longer! If being called "transgender" or "transgendered" lumps me with the crossdressers, fine. We are all gender-oppressed, and we all should feel free to rebel in our own individual ways. I am secure enough in my identity as a transsexual woman not to fear losing it to the crossdressing transgendered majority, most members of which are far too quickly attacked for making their own choices. (Just don't call my SRS cosmetic(!) surgery, OK?)

These attempts to draw such dichotomies between sexual and gender minority subgroups would be meaningless, if the consequences weren't so tragic. As a *queer* activist, I am constantly fighting with gay men and lesbian activists who use the distinctions between sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as reasons to exclude transgendered people politically form their parochial agendas. As members of sexual minority subgroups, we can readily differentiate ourselves based on our individual identities: gay man, lesbian, bisexual man, transgendered woman. As members of the gender community, we can similarly differentiate ourselves: transsexual, crossdresser, transgenderist, passing woman, stone butch. But our common oppressors cannot and will not discern these differences: we are all queers. In the joy of finding ourselves and establishing our identities, we are losing our perspectives on the rest of the world, which despises us. Over-emphasizing these differences between us leads to disunity and distracts us from making common cause to defeat our common enemy. Individually, each of us has already paid a heavy price for the freedom to self-identify ourselves. Collectively, must that right now come at an even greater price, that we will be a "community" perpetually at war with itself over its petty differences?

And what about the political reality? Like it or not, we are part of a queer liberation movement, and almost all the gay men, lesbians and bisexual men and .women I have met know us as transgendered. To them, I am a transgendered activist -- no offense taken! And (horrors) now straight people are getting to know the word, too. I loved the article in *Esquire*. What's next? Transgender chic? Ads for *Transexual Menace* T-shirts in *People* magazine?

Transgendered? Yes, I am. Get over it. Let's all get over it and get onto more important matters at hand, like the survival of our community.

Very Truly Yours,
Jessica M. Xavier,
Silver Spring, Maryland

Dear Davina:

I've wanted to write to you for some time but really didn't have a topic. But now I have an issue that I think needs airing: the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care and Transsexualism in the DSM. No wonder more and more transsexuals are going abroad for their surgery. It is ridiculous that we are expected to consider ourselves sick and then have the insurance companies refuse to pay for the surgery saying it is cosmetic. If it is cosmetic then it is ridiculous to have to undergo a year or more of therapy before getting a referral for surgery. Therapy may be necessary for very young or questioning individuals, but for many of us, several visits should be sufficient. As for myself I don't believe I need any therapy and am now considering going abroad for my surgery because I also don't want to be on high doses of estrogen for a year or more just so the doctors can follow the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care. I also don't feel like living for a year more without SRS to fulfill the Real Life Test requirements. That would be like having a woman wear falsies for a year before getting breast implants. No doctor would consider that reasonable and yet those of us that are sure of ourselves are still forced to wait a long time and bear a considerable extra expense and discomfort just to protect the providers from being sued I guess. Personally I'm planning on taking the money I would have spent on therapy and buying an airline ticket with it. I hope to be healed up and getting on with my life long before I would have even been allowed surgery in this country thank you very much.

Michelle Ress,
Santa Cruz, California

Dear Editor,

Thanks for the great interview with Sandy Stone. She gave us the greatest quote in transgender history when she said "after spending the first half of our lives with our future in a closet, why should we spend the second part of our lives with our past in a closet?" It was a quote that transformed my life.

I just returned from the 10th Gay and Lesbian Health Conference in Minneapolis, and wanted to report on an incredulous event -- the takeover of the Conference's first-ever Transgender Health Symposium by transsexuals. Dallas Denny (America's most active transsexual mental health professional), Armand Hotimsky (head of France's grass roots transgender organization) and myself had been invited to give presentations by the Symposium organizer, Dr. Walter Bockting of Minnesota's Gender Identity Center. As Dr. Bockting was introducing the panel, Margaret O'Hartigan and ***(continued on page 15)***

# Protest Against Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's Exclusionary Policy Will Continue This Year

The brochure for the 1995 Michigan Womyn's Music Festival has been published and again contains the same discriminatory language as it has in the previous three years; that is, that "MWMF is a gathering of mothers and daughters for all womyn born womyn." Festival producer Lisa Vogel has explicitly indicated that the decision to allow transsexual women to enter the festival last year does not signal an end to the discriminatory policy and that she has every intention of retaining the discriminatory policy this year and in future years.

As the producers of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival have made clear that they have no intention of changing the festival's policy of discriminating against transsexual womyn, the effort to change that policy that has been conducted at the previous three festivals will continue this year.

Strategy for this years protest has not been finalized as of yet, but it is expected that one or more transsexual women will probably enter the festival again this year and refuse to leave if asked to do so. There will probably also be a transsexual encampment outside the festival again as there was last year.

Since there is a great deal of expense involved in conducting this type of activity, we are in great need of financial assistance to continue with this important work on behalf of the transsexual community. Our expenses include such things as literature, buttons and stickers to distribute, transportation, festival tickets, food, camping supplies, postage, telephone calls, faxes, among other expenses. Altogether, it requires a sum of several thousand dollars to conduct this activity each year. The individuals involved in this activity also spend hundreds of hours of their time and expend enormous amounts of personal energy on it.

However, we all feel that our effort is very worthwhile because what happens at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival not only affects that event itself, but has wide-ranging implications on what happens within the lesbian/feminist community throughout the world. Women come from all over the world to attend the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, and they take back to their local communities what they have learned at the festival. Conducting this kind of educational activity at Michigan is simply the most efficient and effective way of reaching the entire lesbian/feminist community and of drawing attention to the exclusion of transsexual womyn from lesbian/ feminist events everywhere. The protest against the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's exclusionary policy is, quite simply, *the frontline in the struggle against the exclusion of transsexual womyn within the lesbian/feminist community*.

Please help us to continue to the vital work that we have begun at the festival. We have managed to accomplish a tremendous amount of consciousness-raising both at the festival itself and in the larger lesbian/feminist community, and we know that the vast majority of womyn who attend the festival support our right to attend. We have no doubt that we will succeed if we only persevere. But we need help in order to sustain our momentum.

We need to raise a lot of money in a very short period of time. Any amount of money that you can possibly contribute to this vital effort will help us to continue the process that we have begun, and will help to further the empowerment of our community everywhere.

In addition to money, we need more transsexual womyn who are willing to go to the festival and to help us conduct our consciousness-raising activities. We are in need both of transsexual womyn who are willing to enter the festival knowing that they might be expelled and of transsexual and nontranssexual womyn who are willing to help us conduct consciousness-raising activities outside the festival gates.

Please send whatever financial contribution that you can afford to:

Davina Anne Gabriel
4004 Troost Avenue
Kansas City, Missour 64110

Please make checks payable to Davina Anne Gabriel and indicate "Michigan Fund" in the memo space.

If you would like to get involved personally in the consciousness-raising activities that will continue to take place at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, please contact me at the above address, by telephone at (816) 753-7816, or by e-mail at davinaanne@aol.com or at DavinaAnne if you are on America Online.

Thank you for your consideration.

*--Davina Anne Gabriel*

TRANS-ACTION NEWS

# Second Defendant Convicted of Murder of Brandon Teena

(Falls City, Nebraska) -- John Lotter has been convicted of three counts of first-degree murder in the deaths of Brandon Teena, Lisa Lambert and Phillip DeVine, as well as three counts of use of a deadly weapon and one count of burglary. The jury of ten women and two men -- all from Omaha, Nebraska and sequestered in Falls City throughout the duration of the trial -- delivered its verdict on Thursday; 25 May 1995. Jurors were selected from Omaha because Lotter's attorney successfully argued that he could not be provided a fair trial by local residents because of the amount of negative publicity that has been generated about the case.

Lotter will face sentencing, along with Marvin Thomas Nissen, who has already been convicted in the deaths of Brandon Teena, Lisa Lambert & Philip DeVine in March, (see "Trans-Action News" in *TransSisters* # 8) sometime during the week of 24 July 1995. Lotter faces a maximum penalty of death by electrocution. Because Nissen reached a plea bargain agreement with prosecutors in exchange for his testimony, he now faces a maximum penalty of three terms of life imprisonment. Nissen also previously faced a maximum penalty of death by electrocution because of his conviction of first-degree murder.

> ***"I said, 'Lotter, if you kill Brandon there, you're going to have to kill everyone else'." -- Marvin Thomas Nissen testifying against co-defendant John Lotter***

Brandon Teena, whose birth name was Teena Brandon, was originally from Linclon, Nebraska, and moved to nearby Humboldt in 1993, shortly after beginning to live full-time as a man in preparation for eventual sex-change surgery. Brandon passed easily as a man in Humboldt, but was discovered to be biologically and legally female by local police who arrested him on a misdemeanor check forgery charge two weeks prior to his slaying. Police then publicly released this information to the local newspaper, the *Falls City Journal*. One week later, on Christmas Day 1993, Brandon was raped and assaulted at a Christmas party by two men, whom he identified to local police as Nissen and Lotter, despite the fact that they had threatened to kill him if he reported the incident to the police. Brandon, along with Lisa Lambert and Phillip DeVine, was murdered one week later. (see "Trans-Action News" in *TransSisters* #s 4 & 8)

Lotter pleaded not guilty to involvement in the murders, claiming that although he was with Nissen on the night they were committed, that he was outside asleep in a car while Nissen was committing the murders. Lotter has demonstrated a remarkable propensity toward violence by twice ripping the sink off the wall of his jail cell while awaiting trial.

Lotter's attorney, Mike Fabian, was unsuccessful in preventing Nissen from testifying against Lotter during the trial. In his opening arguments on Monday; 15 May, Fabian told the jury that the evidence suggesting Lotter was involved in the triple-slaying was circumstantial.

In his opening arguments, special prosecutor James Elworth told jurors that his case would prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Lotter and Nissen both committed the murders and that he would introduce evidence that showed that Lotter feared being sent to prison because Brandon Teena had identified him as one of his assailants, as well as that Lotter had bragged about having taken Brandon's pants down at a Christmas party at which Brandon was raped and assaulted by Nissen and Lotter.

On the second day of the trial, Tuesday; 16 May, Elworth called several witnesses to the stand to piece together circumstantial evidence against Lotter. Police officers and scientific experts provided testimony regarding the evidence against Lotter, including a small blue box containing an automatic pistol, seven bullets and six shell casings, a knife and a sheath, a plastic bag of dried blood, a pair of yellow work gloves and autopsy photographs.

Nebraska State Patrol investigators testified that on the night after the bodies were discovered, that they found a gun and a sheathed knife tucked inside a pair of gloves on the frozen Nemaha River, just south of Falls City. Sgt. Ron Osborn testified that the knife sheath bore the name "Lotter." State Patrol blood expert Reena Roy testified that tests at the patrol's crime laboratory indicated that blood on the blade was the same type as Brandon Teena's, but that 41% of all white people also have that same blood type. Another State Patrol officer testified that forensic tests indicated that the .380-caliber gun found on the ice was the same weapon used to commit the triple-slaying.

Nissen began his testimony against Lotter on the third day of the trial, Wednesday; 17 May, stating that he and Lotter committed the triple-slaying after plotting for six days to murder Brandon Teena. Nissen testified that he and Lotter began plotting to murder Brandon on 26 December 1993, the day after they had raped and assaulted him. "He (Lotter) said a dead witness couldn't testify," Nissen was quoted as stating.

Nissen stated that Lotter did all of the shooting, but that he stabbed Brandon. When asked by prosecuting attorney Elsworth why he stabbed Brandon after Lotter had already shot him, Nissen stated that he did so because he thought that Brandon was still alive. Asked what made him think that, Nissen answered, "She was twitching."

Nissen also testified that he had made a plea bargain with prosecutors in which they agreed that he would be sentenced to

three terms of life imprisonment, that he would be transferred to a prison outside Nebraska and that prosecutors would not use his testimony against him. Nissen stated that he had previously lied to police, to journalists and to fellow inmates, but that he was now telling the truth about the slayings.

According to Nissen, he and Lotter travelled to Brandon Teena's hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska on 26 December thinking that Brandon might be there. They went to three locations listed in an address book that Brandon had left at Nissen's home, but were unable to find him at any of those locations. Nissen stated that he and Lotter had planned to persuade Brandon to leave with them, then to take him somewhere else and chop off his head and hands so that his body couldn't be identified. They took along an axe, a rope and a change of clothing with them to Lincoln.

After failing to find Brandon in Lincoln, Lotter and Nissen spent the next five days drinking and plotting to kill Brandon. The plot took on added urgency after they were questioned by a police officer about the rape and assault which Brandon had identified them as the perpetrators of. "Was there any question in your mind that you were going to kill Teena Brandon at that point?" special prosecutor James Elworth asked Nissen, to which Nissen replied, "No question."

Nissen and Lotter drove to Rulo, Nebraska on 30 December 1993 to see Nissen's mother, Sharon Miller. Nissen told her that he wanted her to take power of attorney over his youngest child, but didn't tell her why. They then returned to Falls City. On their return trip, Lotter told Nissen that he knew where he could get a gun. After getting sandwiches and beer at Nissen's house, they then went to Lotter's mother's house, where Lotter procured two pairs of work gloves. Prosecutors also allege that Lotter obtained a knife at that time.

They then went to the home of Eddie Bennett, a man who they knew to have a gun. Nissen testified that Lotter went inside and got the gun from Bennett. Nissen testified that after procuring the gun, "John Lotter said that he was going to take care of Teena Brandon."

Thinking that Brandon might be at the home of Lana Tisdale, a woman whom Brandon had been dating, Nissen and Lotter then drove there, planning to try to get Brandon out of the house, but intending to kill him there if he would not leave. Nissen was quoted as then saying, "I said, 'Lotter, if you kill Brandon there, you're going to have to kill everyone else'."

Ms. Tisdale's mother, Linda Gutierres, told Nissen and Lotter that Brandon was staying at the home of Lisa Lambert. With Nissen driving, and Lotter giving directions, they went to Ms. Lambert's farmhouse in nearby Humboldt. On the way there, Nissen again told Lotter that if they killed Brandon at someone else's house, that they would have to kill everyone else there as well.

There was no sign that anyone was at the farmhouse when they arrived, so they banged on the door. When no one answered, Nissen held open the screen door and Lotter kicked the front door open. Nissen then turned on a lamp and followed Lotter into the bedroom, where they found Lisa Lambert lying in bed and her 8-month old son, Tanner, in a crib. Nissen asked her if Brandon were there, but she did not answer him. "I noticed that on the floor at the foot of the bed there was a blanket covering what looked like a person," Nissen testified. After discovering that it was Brandon under the blanket, Nissen pulled him to his feet.

Lisa Lambert, Lotter and Nissen were all yelling and the baby was crying. Nissen testified that he turned around to calm the baby, and when he turned around again, Brandon Teena was lying on the bed, but that he had not heard a gunshot. Nissen then asked Lotter for the knife. After Lotter gave it to him, Nissen grabbed Brandon by the shoulders, pulled him towards himself, and stabbed him in the abdomen. Lisa Lambert then asked Nissen, who goes by his middle name Tom, "Tom, why are you doing this?" Nissen did not answer, but then picked up the baby to try to calm him. Lisa Lambert then asked for the baby, and Nissen handed him to her. She then set the baby beside her on the bed. Lotter then shot her in the stomach, whereupon "She jumped and screamed," Nissen testified. Nissen then returned the baby to his crib and asked Lisa Lambert if anyone else were in the house. She told him that Phillip DeVine was in another room.

While Lotter went to find Phillip DeVine, Nissen stayed with Lisa Lambert. Lotter returned to Lisa Lambert's room a short while later with Phillip DeVine. Nissen testified that Phillip DeVine was hysterical as Lotter brought him to the doorway of Lisa Lambert's room. Lotter then shot Lisa Lambert again.

Nissen and Lotter then took Phillip DeVine into the living room. "He was saying that he didn't see anything and he wouldn't


## What is Rite of Passage?

Rite of Passage is a small group of postoperative male-to-female transsexual persons. RoP's primary function is to conduct an annual retreat at which those who have recently had surgery and those whose surgery was years or decades ago come together. The experience is spiritual -- some would say magical -- as women from all across the United States enjoy the rustic setting with others who have shared their marvelous journies. (Female partners of participants are also welcome to attend.)

The Conference culminates with a ritual in which the attendees celebrate that which they all share -- their blood sacrifice.

For Information About Rite of Passage, write to:
R.O.P.
P.O. Box 67 South Berwick, Maine
03908

tell anyone and he wasn't from around here," Nissen stated. Lotter told him to sit on the couch, and then shot him twice. Nissen stated that Lotter then went back into Lisa Lambert's room, and that he heard more gunshots.

Nissen and Lotter then returned to Falls City by a roundabout route, throwing their gloves, the gun and the sheathed knife over the Nemaha River bridge south of Falls City.

Defense attorny Mike Fabian attacked Nissen's credibility, pointing out inconsistencies between his various statements to police, to a *Playboy* magazine writer and to fellow inmates. Nissen admitted that he had changed his story several times, but insisted that he was now telling the truth.

On Thursday; 18 May, John Lotter's former girlfriend, Rhonda McKenzie, testified that Lotter had threatened to kill Brandon Teena a week before the murders took place. The threat took place at the same Christmas party at which Brandon was raped and assaulted by Nissen and Lotter. Ms. McKenzie, who was living with Lotter at the time of the murder, testified that Lotter told Brandon, "I ought to go out and kill you since you lied to my sister and everybody else." She further testified that after returning home at approximately 2:30 a.m. on 1 January 1994 that Lotter awakened her and said to her, "Rhonda, I need to talk with you. If anybody, if the cops come and ask you any questions, to tell them I got back between 12:30 and 1:00."

Approximately forty persons from across the United States travelled to Falls City on the first day of Lotter's trial, Monday; 15 May, to participate in a demonstration against violence against transsexual and transgendered persons and a vigil to commemorate the life of Brandon Teena. The demonstration and vigil took place outside the Richardson County Courthouse in Falls City.

Participants in the demonstration came from as far away as California, Washington, New York, Florida, Arkansas, New Jersey Massachusetts , Oregon and Minnesota, as well as from Nebraska, and the nearby states of Missouri, Iowa and Kansas, and included noted activist/authors Leslie Feinberg, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Kate Bornstein.

Approximately 150 persons also turned out to hear Feinberg, Pratt and Bornstein speak about the relationship between the trans community and the larger queer community and to read from their works at All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church in Kansas City, Missouri the previous day, Sunday; 14 May. That event was sponsored by the Kansas City chapter of Interweave, the queer affiliate organization of the Unitarian Universalist Church.

Residents of Falls City were generally supportive of the demonstrators, although some residents who drove by them, mostly adolescent and young adult males, expressed support for Lotter and disdain for the demonstrators in a variety of ways, ranging from cheers for Lotter to verbal insults and hand gestures directed at the demonstrators. There were no incidents of actual violence or threats of violence. Local authorities were respectful of and cooperative with the demonstrators.

An unidentified retired lawyer who spoke to the demonstrators stated that there was virtually no support for Lotter among the townspeople, and that most were very resentful towards him because of the amount of negative publicity that this case has focused on Falls City, as well as because of the enormous expense that has incurred to Richardson County in order to try his case.

*(Information for this article was obtained from the **Omaha World-Herald** and from the Richardson County (Nebraska) County Judge's office.)*

## Leslie Feinberg Delivers Graduation Address

(Haverhill, Massachusetts) -- After a month of struggle, students at Bradford College in Haverhill, Massachusetts made history on 18 April 1995 by winning the right to have Leslie Feinberg deliver their senior commencement address.

The senior class had voted to invite Feinberg as their 1995 graduation speaker after reading her novel *Stone Butch Blues* in the Senior Humanities class. But Bradford President Joseph Short vetoed Feinberg, saying she isn't appropriate and that her "foreign concepts" might offend the wealthy alumni and Board of Trustees at graduation.

> ***"This is the system that has attempted to divide us by bigotry, that uses racism and the scapegoating of poor women and immigrants to produce war and mass unemployment--which many here will soon know all too well--in the name of producing vast riches for the very few." -- Leslie Feinberg, speaking at a graduation ceremony at Bradford College***

Short said commencement isn't "an appropriate time" for a transgendered speaker. But based on the school motto--"Dare to be different!"--the seniors formed Students Daring for Diversity with its own motto: "It is always an appropriate time for an oppressed voice to be heard." This alliance held meetings, sent letters to the press, issued petitions, and gained national attention through an Internet-disseminated fax campaign aimed at the president.

On April 5, more than 100 of Bradford's 500 students occupied the main academic building. The local press supported Short. The *Haverhill Gazette* editorialized that Feinberg has no more right to speak on campus than the Nazis and Klan. The *Eagle-Tribune* taunted the students' choice of "their favorite freak."

The students forged a united front with faculty, members of the staff, parents, alumni and deans. Angry students wrote eloquent rebuttals to the newspapers and organized support on- and off-campus. Professor Peggy Walsh publicly rejected President Short's overture to speak in Feinberg's place, and the Bradford faculty voted unanimously to support the senior class and vowed that no professor would speak at commencement if Feinberg were silenced.

The grounds keepers suggested that if the toilets weren't cleaned and the lawn not mowed, it would be hard to hold commencement. Parents and alumni offered support. Deans pledged to help.

Students issued appeals for support on the Internet. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation worked to obtain media coverage and solidarity with the students. Letters from the Mexican American Defense League and the presidents of the National Writers Union and PEN supported the students' choice of Feinberg to speak.

The phone and fax blitz was so successful that Short reportedly had to pull the plug on his fax machine; phone calls to the president's office were transferred to another office. With a steady stream of faxes burning up his machine, President Short decided to go on a retreat off campus.

After thinking over the unprecedented response to his ban, Short reversed himself on 18 April, and welcomed Feinberg to the commencement exercises. Later that week he issued a statement to the Associated Press declaring that Feinberg would deliver the official commencement address. When Short called Feinberg's home to ask if she would speak, she told him, "I have already accepted the students' invitation and have confirmed travel plans."

***"Nelson had a distorted idea about being a female. . . I'd be surprised if any reputable doctor would take him on . . .it became obvious to us very quickly that he . . . was not a candidate for our program because he was, and is, a sick individual." -- Dr. Terrence Malloy***

The night before commencement, at a student-run baccalaureate affair, Short admitted the irony of his situation. He lamented his choice of the slogan "Dare to be different" for the college's 1991 marketing and recruitment drive. "The class of 1995 took it a little too far, making it a rallying cry," Short said.

Along with pressing for Feinberg to speak, the students voted to create the "Feinberg Fund for Diversity," and presented her a plaque honoring the creation of the fund at their 12 May student-run ceremony.

The local *Haverhill Gazette* ran a front-page story 12 May attacking Feinberg. Quoting Accuracy in Academia, a right-wing group that describes itself as "Washington watchdogs," the paper charged that "Feinberg has been a member of Workers World Party, a Marxist organization, for 23 years."

In her opening remarks to the commencement, Feinberg met the charges head on, to the delighted applause of the assembled Bradford community. "I am a communist, and an editor of *Workers World* newspaper, because I dare to call the system by its name -- capitalism," Feinberg replied. "This is the system that has attempted to divide us by bigotry, that uses racism and the scapegoating of poor women and immigrants to produce war and mass unemployment -- which many here will soon know all too well -- in the name of producing vast riches for the very few."

Feinberg called on those present to join her in New York City on June 3-4 for the organizers' conference of the National People's Campaign, and to converge on Washington, D.C., in October "with anything on wheels" as part of a caravan for justice.

She finished to thunderous applause. Many in the audience signed up to continue their victorious experience in this wider struggle for justice. Feinberg, was quoted in *Workers World* as saying, "This is the first time in modern history that a group of non-transgendered people has carried out civil disobedience and sustained protest in defense of a transgendered person's right to speak. People all over the country are proud of the Bradford students' militant actions. But no one is more proud of them than I am."

## Transsexual Woman Kills Two in Jersey Shootout

(Haddon Heights, New Jersey) -- A South Jersey transsexual woman who held police at bay for more than 14 hours surrendered to police on Friday; 21 April 1995 to face charges of killing two officers and wounding a third. Leslie Ann Nelson, 37, opened fire on two police officers and a prosecutor's investigator as they tried to administer a search warrant to search for weapons.

Witnesses said as many as 100 shots were fired when the three men tried to force their way into the house. Nelson barricaded herself inside as dozens of officers surrounded the house.

Nelson was charged with two counts of murder, and one count of attempted murder in the critical wounding of another officer, the slain officer's older brother.

Nelson wore a bullet-proof vest and gas mask as she emerged from her home, where she lived with her parents. Nelson's


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mother was home when the shooting began but apparently escaped the house. Prosecutor Edward Borden says Nelson was armed with a weapon that could have torn through bullet-proof vests.

A judge ordered her held without bail in a jail's psychiatric unit on two counts of murder and one of attempted murder. .Nelson could face the death penalty if she is convicted of killing the law enforcement officers.

Two officers had gone to the house the previous day, Thursday; 20 April, to investigate a report that a 3-year-old child who lived there had been sexually abused, Camden County Assistant Prosecutor Joseph Audino said. Audino did not know the child's relationship to Nelson.

While the officers spoke to the child's mother, they noticed at least one semi-automatic handgun and a shotgun in the house as well as shell casings on the floor. The officers later determined that Nelson had a prior arrest record for illegal weapons possession, officials said. A search warrant was issued and the two officers and the investigator went to the house later that afternoon.

Nelson opened fire with an AK-47 rifle after the two officers and the investigator went to her home in Haddon Heights in suburban Philadelphia to search for weapons, police said. After a brief conversation with the officers in the house, Nelson got "scared" for no apparent reason and started firing, Camden County Prosecutor Edward Borden said.

Jack McLaughlin, a Camden County prosecutor's investigator, was killed as he went upstairs. Nelson, firing from a second-floor window, then fatally shot Haddon Heights Police Officer John Norcross, 24, as he stood across the street, Borden said. He was pronounced dead at Cooper Medical Center in Camden. His brother, Detective Sgt. Richard Norcross managed to escape the house despite gunshot wounds to the liver, chest, hand and wrist.

***"This action was not born out of concern for transsexual and transgendered persons. It is not about the panelists not being members of the community -- the charge that we are not is specious -- but about Margaret O'Hartigan's long-standing grudge at PHS. The other protestors served as her dupes." -- Dallas Denny***

Camden County Prosecutor Edward F. Borden said police searching Nelson's bedroom found newspapers and magazines that "would indicate a fixation with guns and a hatred of police officers."

People who grew up with Nelson describe her as always being a loner and not having any friends while growing up. Neighbors who had known Nelson in high school say that as a teenager she was quiet but a smart, straight-A student. But they also describe her behavior as increasingly bizarre in recent years.

Nelson had been rejected as a candidate for transsexual surgery by Dr. Terrence Malloy in the late 1980s after psychological tests revealed that she was "psychotic, paranoid, suicidal and hostile."

Dr. Malloy was quoted as telling the *Courier-Post* newspaper that Nelson's problems were more than any surgeon could solve. "My records indicate that Nelson had a distorted idea about being a female. He thought it would help him in life, make his problems go away. But his problems were not with gender, they were more complicated than that . . . I'd be surprised if any reputable doctor would take him on. He came here for a screening and it became obvious to us very quickly that he had very serious psychological problems. Simply, he was not a candidate for our program because he was, and is, a sick individual."

It is not known exactly where Nelson was able to obtain transsexual surgery or whether she was administered any psychological testing prior to surgery; however, a *Courier-Post* source who saw her medical records said that her doctor has a Colorado address. Dr. Malloy stated that doubts that standard procedure for individuals seeking transsexual surgery were followed in Nelson's case. "The Harry Benjamin Standards of Care are guidelines, good guidelines! But every state has different laws. If you wanted to, you could get the operation in one day, without so much as a word with a psychiatrist," Dr. Malloy stated.

## Activists Disrupt, Take Over Trans Health Symposium

(Minneapolis, Minnesota) -- A transsexual/transgender health symposium on Sunday; 18 June 1995, organized by Dr. Walter Bockting of the University of Minnesota's Program in Human Sexuality (PHS) for the 17th. National Lesbian and Gay Health Conference was taken over by transsexual activists on the grounds that the symposium's panel was "not comprised of representatives of our community, despite claims that it is." The panel consisted of Martine Rothblatt and Dallas Denny, both out postoperative transsexuals, and Armand Hotimsky, a female-to-male transsexual. All three panelists are long-term transsexual /transgender activists.

Before the symposium's start, protestors handed out materials documenting problems with health care for transsexual and transgendered persons, which contained health-related materials published by one of the panelists (Denny). As Bockting was making introductory comments, ***(continued on page 19)***

Renee Chinquapin, MA

Consulting & Training

1140 Grizzly Peak Blvd.
Berkeley, CA 94708
(510) 841-2101
chinquap@ix.netcom.com

*"Thinking Globally"*

# Telling Our Stories: Our Very Own Wrinkle

*by Renee Chinquapin*

Life is a challenge, and life as a transsexual even more so. Re-aligning your gender and massively redesigning your body can't be easy. So each of us has been through a lot of painful, frightening, unforeseeable, and utterly unique transformations, our own little dyings and rebirthings.

I think the best way to heal ourselves, and the best way to turn our particular diversity into just another wrinkle on the great hairy elephant of humanity is to tell it like it is, to tell our own stories without artfully embroidering them, without politicizing them, and without pumping up our own egos in the process.

True, I know what it was like for me to struggle with what seemed like a pesky, impertinent, unremittingly demanding *alter ego* I didn't trust or understand. I know what it was like to bowl over my friends, family, and lovers with my awkward, often tasteless enthusiasm for what seemed to them an absurd and kinky self-preoccupation. I recall only too well *my* own forays into a frightening world of potential ridicule and rejection, my own horrendous descent into medical hell, my own bootstrap recovery and return to the world of the living. And I'll likely always fret over my own wounds and limitations, my own ironies and paradoxes, my own personal travails and tiny triumphs.

> ***"I think the best way to heal ourselves, and the best way to turn our particular diversity into just another wrinkle on the great hairy elephant of humanity is to tell it like it is, to tell our own stories without artfully embroidering them, without politicizing them, and without pumping up our own egos in the process."***

But I don't know about *yours*. And neither do "they" out there know about yours, because Geraldo sure has a different agenda on his show than we do, and where else do most people learn about us but as sensationalized oddities on the talk-show circuit? Kate Bornstein, *The Crying Game*, *Priscilla* and all the strong, wonderful political women showing up all over notwithstanding, we are a very poorly understood group, much like gays or lesbians were before Stonewall. And since there are so few of us, and so many of us hide so cleverly, how in the world could people form an accurate picture of us? Frankly, *I* don't even have an accurate picture of us.

**Renee Chinquapin**

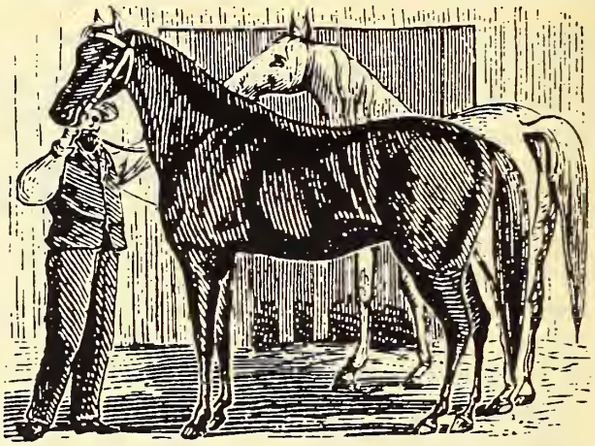
So, I propose that instead of waiting for some ambitious journalist to cobble together a book of interviews with the more outspoken of us, let us instead put together a book of brief, honest, humorous, revealing vignettes depicting who we were, how we got where we are, and how the world looks from where we stand. Let us tell our own stories. And let us tell them so that our humor and humanity charm and dazzle the world. After all, I think we have a lot to offer, we shamans, we who have lived in many worlds in just one lifetime.

Therefore, and in this spirit, I volunteer to do the following,and no more: If **you and your transsexual friends** send me the very, very best, fully edited accounts of just *one* of your experiences, free of theorizing, not trying to say everything that needs to be said, but just *your* brief and brilliant little piece of a chronological mosaic that I offer to assemble as a testament to our shared experience of transformation, then I may be able to actually get it published, distributed and into the hands of our fellow citizens.

But of course I'm not really doing this so *they* will "get" it, but so I will heal a bit, come out a bit more, and turn this peculiar identity struggle into a composite work of art that prances and hollers for itself, quite apart from the lives it hopefully will highlight and empower. Healing takes as many forms as does gender change, but I can't think of anything more worth doing than adding our own special little wrinkle to the ancient, infinitely forgiving elephantine map of our common and not-so-common human experience.

*Renee Chinquapin currently is studying Training and Human Resource Development at U.C. Berkeley and is seeking work as a trainer or consultant with an international focus. She can be reached at 1140 Grizzly Peak Blvd., Berkeley, California 94708, by telephone at 510-841-2101 or online at chinquap@ix.netcom.com*

# The Suffering Behind Premarin



*by Bonnie Stoehn*

Many male-to-female transsexuals and nontranssexual females take Premarin, an estrogen. Many do not know that the name is a composite of the source of the compound: **PR**Egnant **MAR**e's Ur**IN**e. Those who do know its source probably don't know *how* it is produced. This report was received from Stacy Novak, TransEssex, U.K.

In 1993 approximately 75,000 pregnant mares were confined in stalls measuring 8 x 3.5 x 5 feet. Virtually all of their foals were killed soon after birth, or sold and sent to slaughter. Some of the fillies were impregnated as soon as possible to follow in their mothers' footsteps. Actually, it should be footstep as taking one step forward and one backward is all the mares can do in their stalls.

***Approximately eight million women are currently taking Premarin. They have possibly been told about the various side-effects such as increased risk of breast cancer and gall bladder disease. However, there is a direct effect that has been well-hidden . . . cruelty!***

You're probably wondering what obscure backward country would allow such cruelty . . . and WHY? I'll answer those questions and spare you the horrendous detailed accounts of buildings full of pregnant mares who only exercise is weaving back and forth, day in and day out, and of the thousands of young frightened foals crammed into cattle trucks and pens. What I would like to ask, before I go on, is would you be willing to talk to friends, write a letter, or make a phone call to help stop this suffering and slaughter?

This senseless cruelty is occurring right now because of a Canadian based company called Ayerst Organics, Inc. They are the world's only producer of pregnant mare's urine (PMU) from which an estrogen substitute, Premarin, is extracted. Although other substitutes are available, doctors are still prescribing this drug to women needing estrogen replacement therapy.

The equine factory farms are located in Canada, particularly in Manitoba, with some also in North Dakota, U.S.A. The mares are either catheterized or fitted with a cup and hose to collect their urine which is sold at up to £10 (around $15) per gallon to Ayerst Organics, Inc.

Approximately eight million women are currently taking Premarin. They have possibly been told about the various side-effects such as increased risk of breast cancer and gall bladder disease. However, there is a direct effect that has been well-hidden . . .cruelty! What women may not know is that there is another choice; 100% plant derived (synthetic) estrogen replacement is just as effective as Premarin and the wholesale price is virtually identical. Although prices may vary, there are at least six different alternatives on the market today . . . ask your doctor.

Women who are sickened to learn about the suffering and the slaughter may also begin questioning the health risks from the impurities associated with putting animal waste into their bodies. In addition, the natural estrogen found from plant derived substances contains the same ingredients produced by human females while Premarin does not.

If ever there were an example of education directly stopping equine abuse and slaughter, this is it. If women demanded this synthetic plant-based estrogen replacement instead of Premarin, hundred of thousands of mares and their foals would be spared.

There is no time to lose. With millions of women entering menopause, the PMU industry is gearing up. Canadian government officials were unavailable to comment when I called about the reported £14 million they are giving to Ayerst Organics, Inc., toward their £70 million planned facility expansion. As we go to press (in August 1994) 1200 more factory farms have applied to produce PMU.

Unless there is an immediate and overwhelming response from the consumers and the general public, the 150,000 plus mares and foals currently caught up in this nightmare will quickly double and triple. I've been in touch with people working behind the scenes and have offered, on behalf of Redwings and our supporters, to give a safe comfortable home at our Sanctuary in the U.S. to any mares and/or foals that can be rescued. I'll keep you updated but, in the meantime, the horses need our help.

### What You Can Do:.

1. Inform your doctor of the facts and ask him/her to consider prescribing a cruelty-free alternative to patients requiring estrogen.

2. Write a letter to your newsletter or women's magazine explaining how mare's urine is acquired and that there are effective synthetic alternatives available.

3. Write to the Manitoba Government -- the Honorable Marianne Cerilli; Room 234; Legislative Building; Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 0V8, Canada.

4. Write to the company that produces Premarin: Robert Essner, President; Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories; P.O. Box 8299; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19101.

Many thanks to PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine for supplying facts and figures for this article.

*(Editor's note: This article was originally published in **Redwings Horse Sanctuary Newsletter** and is reprinted with permission from Redwings Horse Sactuary. If you are interested in the work of the Sanctuary, please call 011-44-0603-737432. This is an international call to the U.K.)*

## Letters to the Editor *(continued from page 6)*

Christine Tayleur, both activist transsexuals, took over the microphone and announced that the panel was to be restructured. They invited all transsexuals in the audience up to the panel so that the audience could hear the full diversity of transsexual opinion. Dr. Bockting retired to the audience, about ten diverse transsexuals came on stage, and, after much shouting and contention, Ms. O'Hartigan directed the program.

The devil is always in the details. I've been told that Ms. O'Hartigan was rejected for SRS by Dr. Bockting's center and that only her appeal to the Minnesota Supreme Court won her SRS. Ms. O'Hartigan told the audience that Dr. Bockting rejected her numerous requests to be invited to the panel to discuss Minnesota's pending cancellation of state-paid SRS. So she must certainly have felt a sense of *deja vu*.

Dr. Bockting seems to have been an innocent victim in all of this. He is working hard to expand the notion of transsexualism away from gender dysphoria and towards gender creativity, and offered Ms. O'Hartigan time at the end of the program. Alas, every revolution has its innocent victims. The impression that I came away with was one of "today the conference hall, tomorrow the surgical suite!"

Transsexuals must take their destiny into their own hands. Tayleur and O'Hartigan advanced that goal, albeit symbolically. Transsexuals must also be responsible for their own outreach to ensure that public presentations of transsexuals describe our full diversity, from white collar to pink collar, from lawyer to whore, from man to woman, and every kind of skin tone. If we fail to affirmatively reach out and include our full diversity, then the destiny we take into our hands will be the destiny of an elite, not of all our sisters and brothers. In this vein also, Tayleur and O'Hartigan did accomplish needed consciousness-raising on the subject of always being sure to present a diverse transsexual community.

Revolutions and revolutionaries are always flawed, because they are made up of people with their own motivations. Nevertheless, I hope that the Minnesota Health Conference stands for the propositions that transsexual health should be directed by transsexual people, and that transsexual people should be represented in their full diversity. I know that I have occupied more than my fair share of podium time, and other people should be given a chance to be seen and heard. If we can promote these propositions, then a lot of good will come out of the shout-out in Minneapolis.

Thanks for publishing a great magazine. The only 'zine that both my transgen friends and my lesbian friends read is *TransSisters*. It is the one publication I know of that bridges the lesbian and transgendered communities, and provides revolutionary spirit to us all. Keep up the great publication. It incites and inspires us.

In Transpersonhood,
Martine Rothblatt,
Washington D. C.

Dear Davina,

Thank you for *TransSisters*! I ran across #7 and #8 recently, read them cover-to-cover, and enjoyed them immensely. Not only was the quality of the writing high, but more importantly, the issues being considered were among the very ones that most concerned me in my personal quest to become a (hopefully) thoughtful, feminist woman. I'll try to provide a longer, more detailed letter some time. Keep it up!

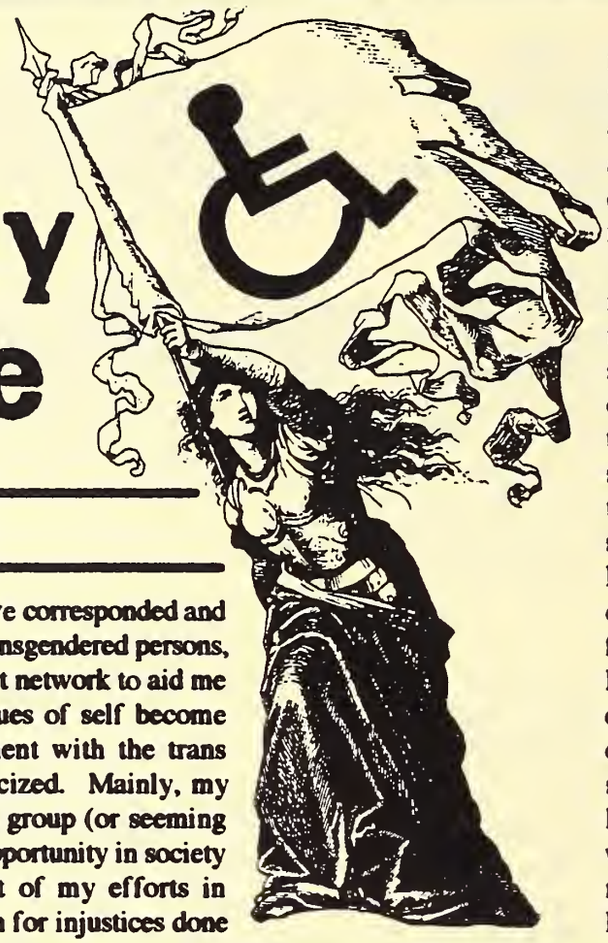
Sincerely,
Anne Lawrence
Seattle, Washington

## Letters to the Editor

*TransSisters: the Journal of Transsexual Feminism* welcomes your comments, suggestions, (constructive) criticism, as well as information affecting the transsexual community, but most of all, your compliments! All letters must be signed, but names will be withheld upon request, except for letters which criticize by name any individual, organization or entity. Any such letters must be signed and will be made available to the individuals or representatives of the entities subjected to such criticism, and they will be allowed to respond in the same issue that such letters are published. Anonymous personal attacks will *not* be published. The editor reserves the rights to refuse publication of any letter and to respond in print to any letter which is published. Please include your address and telephone number in case we want to verify your letter. All letters are subject to editing. Deadlines for letters are as follows: Winter: December 1; Spring: March 1; Summer: June 1; Autumn: September 1.

Please address all letters to: Davina Anne Gabriel; 4004 Troost Avenue; Kansas City, Missouri 64110. *TransSisters* can also be reached by fax at (816) 753-7816, but you must call first, as there must be someone here to receive your fax. *TransSisters* can also be reached via e-mail at davinaanne@aol.com.

# The Disability Initiative



## *by Kristine Wyonna Holt*

Within the past two and a half years, I have corresponded and met with many hundreds of transsexual and transgendered persons, primarily for the purpose of building a support network to aid me through my transition. As many of my issues of self become resolved, I find the focus of my involvement with the trans community becoming more and more politicized. Mainly, my concerns revolve around our civil rights as a group (or seeming lack of them), and how we can assure equal opportunity in society as a whole. This comes about as a result of my efforts in Pennsylvania to seek equity and compensation for injustices done me early in my transition. As my interest changes, so does my support network and the focus of efforts among my friends.

Much of my effort in Pennsylvania has been to establish transsexuality (in particular) as a medical condition which demands accommodation to by employers, housing authorities, government managers, etc. In short -- a disability, albeit not one that interferes with the ability to perform any particular task or job. This tactic has been questioned by some of my contacts. Yet, I feel that it is an extremely valid position, and represents our most likely change to gain equal opportunity in society.

> ***"The stigma of 'disability' is something we, as a community, must overcome. When we do that, we will be able to make our opponents live by their own book of rules. And at that, we will surely gain our equal access to society."***

Most of the objections to the "disability" offense embrace one of two separate philosophies: the "freedom of expression" argument, or the sex discrimination argument. The first says, "By calling transsexuality a disability, you put the focus on us and our behaviors. The focus should be placed on the employers and how they treat us. We need to be guaranteed equal access to society regardless of our individual lifestyles; our battle cry should be 'How dare you treat me badly, just because I'm different than you'!" The second holds, "I'm not handicapped -- I can do anything now just as well as I could do before. The only thing different between now and then is my sex. If that's not outright sex discrimination, I don't know what is!"

Personally, I find no fault with either of these positions. Philosophically, there is no limit to the number of reasons why we should be legally protected from undue discrimination. But from a pragmatic, political viewpoint, there are serious drawbacks to each of these arguments. Since the latter is the easier to dispose of, I'll address it first.

In the United States, our civil rights are generally guaranteed by the Constitution. However, our specific rights and protections are codified within various statutes at the federal, state and local level, and spelled out more-or-less clearly in the case law that develops as the statutes are applied in the courts. For the purpose of sex discrimination, we need to look federally at Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bars discrimination solely on the basis of sex. Each state has a similar statute within its civil rights legislation. (Note: my experience with state statute is necessarily restricted to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which has as its legislation the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act (PHRA). Any comments which reflect on state laws are derived from the PHRA; however, your state's laws are probably similar.) This, then, is the obvious vehicle for seeking protection from sex discrimination.

The only problem is: it doesn't work. The courts have established from early on (*Holloway v. Arthur Anderson & Co.*, 1977) that the definition of "sex" as it appears in Title VII does not include transsexual persons. It's as if the law were designed to protect two sexes -- male and female -- but that transsexuals are a third sex. Of course, the issue is more complex than this; the convoluted arguments are steeped in such language as "traditional meaning" and "congressional mandate." However, the bottom line is clear: Title VII will not protect transsexuals. Since most states take their guidance from the federal courts, you'll likely find this also holds true at the more local levels. Any cause of action based on sex discrimination is dead in the water at its inception.

I've heard it argued that we need to continue the fight under sex discrimination statutes regardless, to keep throwing cases at the courts with the hope that eventually some judge will hand down a positive ruling. Maybe. But each negative ruling only strengthens the opposition. And we have to ask, what would be the cost -- in good cases thrown away, in careers sacrificed, in hopes abandoned? There's no sense feeding people into the legal gristmill; it might be possible to break down the brick wall with

our heads, but I'll argue against it. (Note: a variation of this complaint -- sexual harassment -- is the basis of a federal suit recently filed against an employer in western Pennsylvania. It's too early to tell whether this tactic will prove successful.)

Back, then, to our first argument, that of "freedom of expression." I suppose the thing that bothers me most about this is more what it implies than what it says. The overt statement is clear: one should be treated as a "social equal" regardless of one's manner of dress, choice of name, or overall lifestyle; that a personal choice in appearance or social role that doesn't affect one's ability to perform one's duties should not be the basis for discrimination. What is implied here is the idea that transsexuality is a matter of choice.

How many of us in the transsexual community truly believe that our transsexuality is a matter of choice? How many purges have we subjected ourselves to, how much anguished self-searching, how many "deals with God" struck to deliver us from our compulsions? Our denial is disastrous. By the time we finally begin coming to terms with ourselves, we know fully the first step of recovery: we admitted we were powerless over our transsexuality, and that our lives had become unmanageable. To suggest that there is an element of choice to our lifestyle is to trivialize the extent of our need. For many of us, the *only* choice we have is whether to deal with our sexuality or die.

This said, let's look again at our "freedom of expression" argument. Can we successfully argue that our transsexual behaviors are protected by law, say, under the First Amendment of the Constitution? The picture, sad to say, looks none too bright.

While the First Amendment has been given wide interpretation to include many forms of expression, the courts have held, in numerous rulings, that an employer may have a legitimate interest in regulating an employee's behavior away from the job or other aspects of his or her lifestyle. The most recent example is the controversy over drug testing for employment purposes. Several different rationales are used, but the attempt must be made to seek a balance between the needs of the employer and the needs of the employee. The stronger the need, the more weight it carries in the balance.

In the workplace, the needs of the employer become paramount. The employee's needs must be strong indeed to prevail. The fact is, the courts have generally held that an employee's need to "express himself" through unorthodox dress at work has a very low priority. Dress codes, if applied equally to all employees, have been validated at all levels of jurisdiction. By characterizing the transsexual individual's need to dress and present oneself as the opposite sex as a "freedom of expression" issue, it puts the action at the same level as wearing shorts at an executive business meeting or black hose with a nurse's uniform. This is exactly where most transsexuals run into problems with their employers.

A dress code doesn't even need to be overly specific to become a barrier. In my case, the code merely stated that "each staff will dress and present themselves in a manner in keeping with their job duties." What does that mean? To my employer, it meant that men shall dress as men, and women shall dress as women -- no crossing over, no in-between (remember Title VII?). This tactic has been used all to often to discriminate against transpersons in the workplace, most notably in *Kirkpatrick v. Seligman & Latz*, 1981, and would have worked against me as well, had my employer not committed an error in implementing their restrictions. (A Governor's review of my case held that, because the employer had not disseminated an outline of their restrictive interpretation of the generalized dress code among all the staff members, they had treated me in a "unique and unfair" manner, in violation of the federal statute under which they operate.)

As in my own case, any action won arguing "freedom of expression" will most likely be done so by relying on something other than the needs of transpersons. While this does alright by the individual, it does nothing for us as a community. We end up with a loose collection of wins, with no unifying principle to apply them generally to transpersons. The opposition goes to the heart of the matter; we can only fight skirmishes about the edges. In the end, we fail to establish any sure legal protections for transpeople as a class.

This needn't be the case if we argue medical need. There is no doubt that, as a class, a medical principle is involved here. The DSM-IV lists a constellation of symptoms which clearly indicate a diagnosis for various Gender Identity Disorders. The medical profession has taken it upon itself to establish Standards of Care for the treatment of transsexuals. Medical intervention is clearly indicated for those considering the transsexual option -- endocrinology and surgery, at the very least. And even those with less severe symptoms often endure intensive and lengthy psychiatric intervention.

Saul Alinsky defined tactics as "doing what you can with what you have." We've seen that what we *don't* have is civil protections under Title VII, or as a class under the Constitution. Trying to do something with these is a waste of effort. But what we *do* have is something else: an established medical model of intervention for the trans community, and a growing realization on the part of our legislators that equal opportunity should exist for all elements of society, regardless of physical, mental, emotional or other medical barriers. These two realities summed together become our key to equal access under the law.

What first comes to mind when considering the medical need tactic is the Americans with Disabilities Act, with its infamous transsexual/transgendered exclusion clause. However, *this clause proves the power of the medical need argument*. The framers of the ADA, and most particularly, the opponents to our civil rights, knew that any legislation drafted to prohibit discrimination based upon a medical condition would necessarily *have* to include Gender Identity Disorders, and sought to preempt our argument for protection. The only way to do this was by special exception. So a shameful state of affairs stand at the federal level: although transpersons cannot be considered a special class for purposes of shielding us from discrimination, we can be classed together in the effort to exclude us from protection.

The ADA, though, represents an aberration of established public policy. Up until its enactment, the medical need argument

had been making a strong showing in the courts. *Doe v. McConn,et. al.*, 1980, which declared the Houston anti-crossdressing ordinance unconstitutional, was argued on this principle. My own case recently argued in the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania (*Northwest Pennsylvania Training Partnership Consortium v. Unemployment Compensation Board of Review*, 1994), which established that an employer's dress code that prohibited a transsexual from crossdressing was unreasonable, was also won under this argument. A more important victory was achieved in 1985 with *Doe v. U.S. Postal Service*, which held that transsexual persons discriminated against by employers receiving federal funding could state a cause of action under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It was this action which alerted the framers of the ADA to the possibilities of their impending legislation. Sadly, Congress chose to amend the Rehab Act in October 1992 to reflect the same exclusions as the ADA. A protection we'd gained through the courts was snatched from us by our opponents.

This is not necessarily the case at the state level. Most state statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability or medical need have been around since the 1970s. Many, such as the PHRA, derive their wording and definitions from the Rehab Act. And in my limited research, I'm not aware of any states that have adopted the ADA exclusions into their statutes. So the potential still exists to gain at the state level what we lost at the federal. But it seems that there is a reluctance for us, as a community, to take advantage of this possibility. Why?

I think part of the answer may lie in our fear of being further stigmatized. We already suffer the moral scorn of the self-righteous; now we heap mental illness upon ourselves? This needn't be so. Statutes are usually very widely defined and inclusive. We do not have to characterize ourselves as sick, incompetent, half-witted invalids, but just as what we are in reality -- individuals with a condition that can be diagnosed medically who can suffer unwarranted discrimination because of it.

Let me use Pennsylvania's statute as an example. As with most anti-discrimination laws, a complainant must establish that she has been discriminated against because of a "physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities." The inclusion of Gender Identity Disorders within the DSM-IV satisfies the first requirement, as "mental impairment" can be any psychological disorder. One needn't even have a formal diagnosis to establish a medical condition. It's only necessary that one be "regarded" as having an impairment. Since "working" is considered to be a major life activity, being unable to work because of one's transsexuality completes the qualification. "But," you say, "my transsexuality doesn't render me unable to do my job!" Here's the final kicker: the limitation can exist solely "as a result of the attitudes of others toward the impairment."

In other words, any adverse personnel action perpetrated by an employer against an employee because of her transsexuality or any aspect of its treatment (i.e., "crossdressing") would be considered unlawful. This was the basic premise for the recent victory of *Smith v. City of Jacksonville* under Florida statute; it is the basis of my own continuing action in Pennsylvania. (One could legitimately ask where protection lies for the "former" transsexual, the postoperative individual. Under Pennsylvania law, again, one need only establish "a history of physical or mental impairment" . . . and the ball rolls along again.)

Clearly, the only barrier that exists against us claiming our civil protections as a class is ourselves. Many of us cringe at the label "disabled," even though we recognize it as but a label that describes society's attitude toward us. The feeling might be that we are asking others to treat us differently because of some "deficiency" on our part. That's not the case at all. Consider the following example.

Suppose that one of the gentlemen at your office happened to break a leg one weekend. He gets patched up in a cast which, cumbersome as it is, doesn't severely effect his mobility. It does, however, necessitate some changes in his clothing. Specifically, he finds he must remove one trouser leg above the knee in order to get them on. So, on Monday morning, he arrives at work with his pair of one-legged pants, and is promptly fired.

Our friend appeals this action, arguing that he was unjustly fired because of his broken leg, despite the fact that it didn't effect his ability to do his job. "Not so," says his employer. "You were fired because you violated our dress code. We require all staff to dress appropriately. We do not consider shorts to be appropriate business attire for men. We wouldn't allow any other men in the office to wear shorts. Your trousers were half shorts, so you're insubordinate. Bye-bye!" (Can you imagine if our gentleman friend had tried to wear a kilt?)

Such a ludicrous decision would never be allowed to stand. Yet, this is exactly the situation many transsexuals face. Employers regularly make accommodations when it comes to their employees' medical needs. But when it comes to the dictates of the Benjamin Standards, the same employers are likely to deny that need. We don't seek any special treatment specific to our need -- just the same accommodation that would be given to any other employee in *their* time of need.

And we allow the discrimination to continue by refusing to acknowledge this reality.

Ask any successful person confined to a wheelchair, or who may be insulin dependent, or who suffers from some other physically debilitating condition whether she considers herself disabled. Odds are she'll say "no." She'll most likely tell you that her physical troubles have spurred her on to a greater sense of spiritual development and self-confidence. I view my transsexuality in the exact same light. We would never expect our "disabled" friend to quietly stand by and let others shunt her into second (or third) class status solely because of her physical condition. We would hope she would fight them with every means available to her. Just as I hope we will do.

One of the greatest twentieth century architects of social change, Franklin D. Roosevelt, once said, "Do something. Do anything. If it doesn't work, do something else. If it does work, do it some more." The stigma of "disability" is something we, as a community, must overcome. When we do that, we will be able to make our opponents live by their own book of rules. And

at that, we will surely gain our equal access to society.

*Kristine Wyonna Holt's professional background is in governmental and social services. However, as a result of her termination from work due to her transition, she has turned her talents and energies toward securing civil protections for the transsexual / transgendered community. Acting as her own researcher and attorney, she has brought about several precedent rulings in the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania and the State Executive Office. She dis a resident of Oil City, Pennsylvania*

Kristine Wyonna Holt

## Trans-Action News *(continued from page 12)*

Margaret O'Hartigan, who had seated herself with the panelists, began to read a pre-prepared statement concerning the recent abolishing of government funding for transsexual surgery in Minnesota. O'Hartigan accused Bockting of "remaining shamefully silent" about the funding cuts and demanded that all transgender and transsexual persons present be given equal opportunity to speak as a panelists. Bockting pointed out that 45 minutes had been set aside for this, but when protestors imported from as far away as San Francisco and Pennsylvania sat themselves at the panelists' table, he left the stage, turning the program over to the panelists.

O'Hartigan announced that all speakers, including the original three panelists, would be given ten minutes. Martine Rothblatt spoke first, cutting short the slide show based on her book *The Apartheid of Sex* and leaving the room. Dallas Denny then took the podium, but was interrupted by O'Hartigan, who announced that Machelle Little of Action AIDS in Philadelphia would be the next speaker. O'Hartigan capitulated when members of the audience (which was comprised largely of physicians and other health professionals) called out, "Let her [Denny] speak."

Denny spoke of the many ways in which transsexual and transgender people are oppressed; much of her talk focused on health care issues faced by sex workers and individuals on the street. At one point, Christine Tayleur, a protestor who was acting as sergeant-at-arms, told Denny that her time was up, but Denny concluded at her leisure and went into the audience to sit beside Bockting to show her support.

The various protestors each spoke briefly, expounding on the problems Denny had mentioned earlier. Armand Hotimsky, the third of the invited panelists, was the last speaker. Hedescribed the health care problems of transgendered and transsexual people in France and other countries. Afterwards, audience members (those who were left; many had left in disgust at the time of the takeover) asked questions. Denny, Hotimsky, and the protesting "panelists" took turns responding. Several members of the audience, themselves transsexual or transgendered, spoke in support of Bockting and PHS.

After the symposium, a number of attendees expressed their regret that the educational content of the symposium had been overshadowed by politics. Many of them had pressing practical needs because of their ongoing work with transgendered clients. "How ironic," one of them said. "The supposed concern of the protestors has resulted in a net negative impact on health care of this population."

Denny was not surprised at the action. "Margaret O'Hartigan has been agitating to be on the panel. I suspected something like this might happen, and was convinced of it when I heard Christine Tayleur being paged at the airport." Denny said, "This action was not born out of concern for transsexual and transgendered persons. It is not about the panelists not being members of the community -- the charge that we are not is specious -- but about Margaret O'Hartigan's long-standing grudge at PHS. The other protestors served as her dupes."

Denny seconded the protestors' concern that persons of color were not represented on the original panel. "Classism and racism are an ongoing problem in the community," she said.

## TransSisters Newswatch

*TransSisters: the Journal of Transsexual Feminism* appreciates receiving news clippings or copies of articles about transsexual persons and the issues affecting their lives. You can help *TransSisters* keep the transsexual community informed of events and issues affecting it by sending copies of any such news clippings or aticles to: Davina Anne Gabriel; 4004 Troost Avenue; Kansas City, Missouri 64110.

Articles and clippings can also be sent by e-mail to davinaanne@aol.com (or to DavinaAnne for those of you on America Online) or by fax to (816)753-7816, but you must call first, as there must be someone here to receive your fax.

# S/HE WHO

***S/he* by Minnie Bruce Pratt; published by Firebrand Books; New York, 1995. $10.95 paperback; 189 pages**

***reviewed by Mustang Sally***

Some teachers of novel and screen writing emphasize what they call the "W" theory: switching dramatic direction from triumph to jeopardy then back again to keep the reader/viewer off guard and therefore emotionally involved with the protagonist(s). Minnie Bruce Pratt's *S/he*, a collection of essays/short impressionist pieces whose title one needs rockabilly hiccups to pronounce (think: "Be-Bop-A-Lula, sh-he's my baby") traces a W of a different kind. It veers back and forth between thrilling, daring, genderflex-inspired writing (and theory) and the more tentative, defensive personal reflection that has been a staple of lesbian-feminist writing for over two decades. It is as though Pratt set out to perform a dual task: to open up lesbian-feminist analysis of gender oppression and transgression to embrace gender as we know it (meaning as not necessarily sex-linked), and to do this in a piece of (traditional) lesbian-feminist writing.

> ***"It's an example of how, as I've long thought, a pro-sex feminist could write rings around sex radicals whose work is not informed by feminism but places all the lesbian eggs in the sexual liberation basket. Best of all, this writing passes the ever-popular wet test with flying colors."***

Does she succeed? Yes -- but as to how well, I'm still going back and forth in a W. There is perforce an element of time involved in evaluating this text. As the first work of its kind (the feminist politics of gender fluidity), we cannot at this time place it in the context of the discourse for which we hope it will make space. Moreover, the portions of the book that are flat-out excellent are held back somewhat by the burden of having to make up for all the years that feminist discourse avoided any politik of subverting modern Western society's gender system (beyond relegating transsexuals and other transgendered folk to shock troop duties).

Pratt comes charging out of the gate with one of those flashes of feminist insight that remind me of what made the early days of lesbian feminism so exciting. She recounts her returning to her Southern home town for a reunion. No one there is surprised that the town tomboy (her childhood friend) turned out to be a lesbian. That she did, however, took everyone by surprise, including that tomboy friend. It's an old assumption: lesbianism equals revolt against (not redefinition of) femininity and its enforcement, preferably from an early age. Therefore, "real" lesbians are at least androgynous if not butch (but without appropriating masculinity, as does Pratt's lover, Leslie Feinberg), and their histories are identifiable by anti-feminine themes. Pratt, to her great credit, takes exception to this process. She names her lesbian femininity a gender transgression against both mainstream and lesbian feminist mores, defines the range of such transgressions (including defying postmodern butch/femme with butch-butch or femme-femme interaction), and proceeds to claim the politics of gender transgression as the politics of feminism.

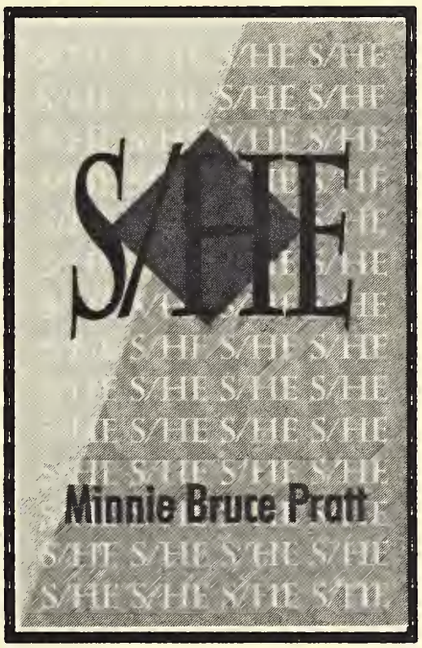
But once the boldness of her stated intent fires gets the reader fired up, Pratt reverts to something very nearly the more generic feminist narrative of the how-I-was-stifled-by-growing-up-female variety. Not quite, but nearly enough to belie the boldness with which Pratt set forth her premise. Much of it has the flavor of those narratives from the late 60s and early 70s by women who expected that by being intellectuals and/or academics, they would gain access to personal credibility and inclusion in adult life on the basis of intellectual merit -- the women who, even prior to the explosion of feminism's second wave, were making a cult heroine of Sylvia Plath.

The difference is that instead of discussing women having a sexuality while seeking protection from the predatory aspects of male sexuality, Pratt discusses being sexual and therefore feeling sexual and expressing the feeling of being sexual. Some readers may remember the rift in women's writing about sexuality in the 70s, between those who defined feminism as that protection and those who defined it as sexual liberation. If you don't remember it, look around -- some of that echoes on in community reaction to lesbian sex 'zines like *On Our Backs*. Pratt refuses to play along with this dichotomy; instead, she places her narrative of her discovery of the power of her sexuality in the genre lesbian feminists used to articulate the process of their discovery of the orientation of their sexuality (or at least their sexual politics).

On one hand, this is still a bold move: remapping lesbian feminist discourse to include issues of gender and sexuality's expression. On the other, it left me feeling as though I were in a time warp. I found myself *en tristesse* both for modern feminism's failure to have taken this fork in the road the first time

around, and for the reminder of how far I've come from the lesbian feminism that once was my life: into a postmodern, queer-informed lesbian feminism in which gender discourse (not to mention play) is taken for granted. Can the twain meet? It may depend on how *S/he* is received among the traditional lesbian feminist reading public. I could only shake my head and wonder what might have been, noting this was another way in which a definitive critical evaluation of this book remained elusive.

In the middle of the book, Pratt writes about her attraction to her transgendered lover, what it is about the interplay of female and male that makes that lover so attractive, and how their interaction reinforces her sense of self and her self-expression as a (lesbian) sexual being. This part of the book absolutely sizzles. Here, Pratt articulates how the butch/femme thing cooks for her without mere reference to gender role semiotics -- the usual failing of those neo-butch/femme fans who take for granted a universal appeal for that dynamic. On dildo/vaginal intercourse, too, she transcends the mere statement of yang/yin to express something original about the desire to be filled by a woman lover. It's an example of how, as I've long thought, a pro-sex feminist could write rings around sex radicals whose work is not informed by feminism but places all the lesbian eggs in the sexual liberation basket. Best of all, this writing passes the ever-popular wet test with flying colors.




In that vein of feminist sex radicalism Pratt moves on to tales of how she and Leslie still manage to commit gender transgressions even among the butch/femme lesbians with whom one would assume they would be right at home. On a book tour with Leslie, Pratt finds herself assumed to be "just a wife," instead of a writer and theorist in her own right, when she struggles to keep up with a busy book table; she is even dissed as a femme because she doesn't sport the long nails with which she could open a shrink-wrapped set of books. In the lesbian wars over the appropriateness of butch/femme desire, the lines are usually sharply drawn; Pratt bridges the gap admirably, doing a great service to discourse on lesbian sexuality. She superbly affirms this way of lesbian passion while challenging it to keep from sliding into a complacency which can indeed coast on the heterosexual model.

The book then slips annoyingly back into the traditional mode of chronicling oppression in that way that risks tumbling into self-pity. Pratt writes about feeling threatened in public by virtue of male reaction to Feinberg's masculine appearance, her own daring to be seen with this masculine woman, and what comes down to garden variety street misogyny and homophobia. From this position, the transition to essays on her Camp Trans experience and the complexities of gender becomes a somewhat awkward leap instead of a progression to a powerful climactic point.

As impressed as I was with the premise of the variety and ubiquity of gender transgressions with which *S/he* began, there was something about the passages on the danger of public gender transgression that left me feeling frustrated, frustrated because it brought up for me the ways in which (MTF) transsexuals can get whipsawed by feminist gender conformity expectations.

**Minnie Bruce Pratt**
photo by Doug Lawson

In one passage, a man watching Pratt and Feinberg shoot baskets dyke-baits them, causing them to fear for their safety. I don't know whether Eastern cities are that much more threatening than West Coast ones (and I ask as a *Hothead Paisan* fan), but there seemed to be an illogic in being that fearful in a situation in which women had a male jerk outnumbered. Even if one does not choose to respond to the cry of "Dykes! Dykes!" with "Asshole! Asshole!" there's still the thumb-and-forefinger sign of the tiny penis, which many women make to great advantage. Is it residue of having been raised male, and/or a height and bulk advantage, that would make me more prone to respond with sarcasm instead of fear?

Before you answer, pause and consider this: I was a high school sissy-bashing victim who learned her street smarts *from a passing woman*, a lesbian friend who had been abandoned as a child, then grew up on the streets. I had a compelling incentive to learn her lessons from the fact that, as a struggling young pre-op who walked or took public transportation through rough parts of town, I was always aware that if I were ever raped I would likely be murdered as well. Despite all the talk of lesbians being Amazons, my actually acting like an Amazon is likely to be construed by transphobic dykes as a "male" advantage, despite the actual history of my assertiveness.

In a similar manner, experimenting with hermaphroditic sexuality (i.e., genital sexuality for pre- or non-ops) is also likely to get one typed as "male," even by butch dykes who may be exploring a drag king side or packing (not to mention by the gender clinics!). Or what about my athletic skills, which I developed as an adult (and post-op) woman after a (seeming) boyhood of never measuring up? What of Sandy Stone's working for the Olivia collective to give ***(continued on page 43)***

# MEET THE NEW BOSS, SAME AS THE OLD BOSS

## by Davina Anne Gabriel

*"It is critical for both more priveleged and relatively more oppressed groups to listen to each other's pain without playing the who-is-more-oppressed game." -- Carol Pearson*

*"If I can't dance, it's not my revolution." -- Emma Goldman*

*"Meet the new boss, same as the old boss" -- Pete Townsend**

Being a lesbian, one of the activities that I have frequent occasion to participate in is the lesbian potluck. At one such event which I attended recently, one of the women in attendance related her experience of living in a co-ed dormitory in 1970s. In this particular dormitory, not only did men and women live together on the same floors, but likewise shared restrooms and shower facilities, something that this woman was not anticipating when she moved into that dormitory.

She proceeded to describe how unpleasant she and the several other lesbians living there found this particular aspect of co-educational living, and how they eventually decided to take over one of the restrooms by declaring it women-only, whereupon one of the men living in the dormitory tacked up a sign outside of it inquiring if the women there did not want to share shower facilities with them because they were ashamed of their bodies. The lesbians then wrote a response stating that it wasn't their own bodies that bothered them, but that it was having to look at male bodies that they did not like.

All of the women at this potluck were entirely supportive of the actions of these lesbians, feeling that having to look at male sexual organs was not something that they would appreciate having to do or find enjoyable. Without exception, these women felt that having to do so would constitute a nonconsensual invasion of their privacy, even though there was never any indication that any of the men whom they had had to share shower facilities with posed any actual danger to them. Every single one of these women felt that it was entirely appropriate for them to take this action and approved of them doing so, and even regarded it as somewhat of a victory -- however small -- for lesbian rights and identity. Likewise, I have no doubt that virtually every lesbian whom I know would feel exactly the same way, that having to see a penis in a shower is not something that they would want to do, or that they should have to do -- unless they had freely consented to do so -- and that to think otherwise would contradict one of the most fundamental realities of lesbian identity.

During the course of this story, I could not help but think to myself how shocked all of these lesbians would be to discover that there are now actually other individuals who identify themselves as lesbians who would tell them that their desire to not have to see a penis in the shower -- even at a women's festival -- is a form of bigotry and that they need to just get over it; and would even go so far as to label this desire to not have to see a penis as some form of mental illness. I believe that if I would have said such a thing to these lesbians that they would think that I had quite literally taken leave of my senses; that they could never imagine another lesbian expressing such an outrageous and clearly anti-lesbian sentiment, and that they would probably question the right of such a person to call herself a lesbian. I have absolutely no doubt that I would indeed be rather hard-pressed to find very many lesbians who would disagree with the sentiment expressed by Mustang Sally in her article "The A.B.C.s of T.G. P.C." in the previous issue of *TransSisters* that "lesbians . . . have every right to be grossed out by penises."

> ***"If what the trans rights movement is going to become about is telling women who don't want to have to see a penis at a women's festival that they need to just get over it, then . . . it's not my revolution."***

Yet, astonishing as it may seem to most lesbians, there are indeed some individuals who identify as lesbians who are presently voicing that very sentiment to other lesbians: that if they don't want to have to see a penis in the shower -- even at a women's festival -- that they need to just get over it. There was in fact a prominent transsexual activist who identifies as a lesbian who was quoted as stating essentially that very thing in an article in a San Francisco lesbian publication last year.

I am the only transsexual woman who has participated in the protest against the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's "womyn born womyn" only policy all three years that it has taken place. During those three years, I have talked to literally hundreds of women there about their feelings about having transsexual women

*(from the song "Won't Get Fooled Again" by Peter Townsend; recorded by The Who on the album *Who's Next*; Decca Records, 1971.

at that festival. Since I am the only transsexual woman to have taken part in these activities all three years, I think that I can say with relative assurance that I probably have a better understanding of the feelings and concerns of these women than any other transsexual woman. Based on the activities that I have been involved in at MWMF and the literally hundreds of women whom I have spoken to, I have absolutely no doubt that the overwhelming majority of them favor the inclusion of postoperative transsexual women at that festival. But I can also say with the same degree of assurance that an even greater percentage of them -- in fact, *virtually all* of them -- oppose the inclusion of preoperative male-to-female transsexuals, or anyone else with a penis, at that festival. In fact, I can count on one hand the number of nontranssexual women who have attended MWMF whom I have spoken to who have stated to me that they think preoperative male-to-female transsexuals should also be allowed to attend that festival.

I realize that this will probably cast me as an "elitist" in the eyes of a great many persons within the transsexual community, but I unequivocally support the right of the women at MWMF -- or any other women-only event for that matter -- to make this distinction. Persons who regard this position as "elitist" are certainly entitled to their opinion. However, I am long past the point of caring what the self-appointed arbiters of transsexual & transgender political correctness think about me or my opinions; I decide issues on their individual merits and not on their adherence to any particular ideology. I didn't march in lockstep with the feminist movement, with the queer rights movement or with the Neopagan movement; and I'll be damned if I'm going to march in lockstep with the trans rights movement either.

Moreover, support for this position can not be accurately characterized as "elitist" if there are in fact legitimate reasons for making such a distinction; and there are indeed quite a number of reasons for making this exact distinction which are entirely valid, and which the proponents of preop inclusion have entirely failed to address. Furthermore, this sentiment can not be accurately characterized as "elitist" because it applies exactly the same standard of conduct to postop transsexuals as it does to preop transsexuals; that is, that *neither* one of them has any sort of intrinsic right to be in any private women-only space in which they are not welcome; that is, any space in which a clear majority of women do not want them to be there. Contrary to the opinions of some MTF transsexuals, merely identifying as a woman, or living as a woman, or even undergoing transsexual surgery does not give *any of us* any *intrinsic* right to be in women-only space. Women-only space is by definition private; and therefore, the only right that MTF transsexuals have to be in such space is derived from the consent of the women already in that space. Yet to hear some transsexuals talk, one would think that it is entirely up to transsexuals to decide who should and who should not be allowed to be in women-only space.

It is true that the original survey that was conducted at MWMF regarding the question of whether transsexuals should be allowed to attend that festival did not specify the distinction between preop and postop status. At the time, I expressed my opinion that this was a shortcoming of the survey. However, a very substantial portion of those answering the survey did specify that their support for transsexual inclusion extended only to postop, and not to preop, MTF transsexuals. Similarly, many of the women who stated that they were against transsexual inclusion cited the presence of penises as their reason for opposing such inclusion, indicating that they probably would not be opposed to the presence of postop transsexual women at the festival.

However, it is not upon the basis of those survey results that I have formulated my conclusion that the overwhelming majority of women at MWMF oppose the inclusion of anyone with a penis, but on the basis of the literally hundreds of conversations I have had with women at the festival about the issue of transsexual inclusion. The opposition to the presence of anyone with a penis is a sentiment that I have heard expressed over and over again, even by some of the most ardent supporters of the inclusion of postop women. Likewise, I have heard it stated by a great many women who are opposed to postop inclusion that the reason they oppose it is because they feel it will eventually open the door to the inclusion of preops as well. Janis Walworth, who is probably the only woman who has spoken to more women about this issue than have I, fully concurs with my assessment that not only do the overwhelming majority of the women at MWMF oppose the presence of anyone with a penis, but that if we were to bring such persons into the festival against their wishes, or even to begin to advocate such a position, that we would inevitably lose virtually every bit of support that we presently have for the inclusion of postop transsexual women.

Last year, I was among a group of transsexuals who entered MWMF. Also among this group were several preop MTF transsexuals. I was not allowed to be in on the decision making process when it was decided who was going to go inside, nor did I know who was going to go in until we actually entered the festival. However, if I have had been in on that decision, knowing that the overwhelming majority of the women at MWMF unquestionably disapprove of anyone with a penis being in that space, I would have most strenuously opposed any such person going inside. But since I wasn't allowed to participate in that decision, along with the fact that the message that we got back from the festival producers asking them to clarify the term *womyn born womyn* was that it was up to each individual to interpret that term, I do not believe that my entering of that festival along with preop transsexuals constituted an endorsement or approval of them doing so.

However, since that time, I have not felt good about participating in that action either, particularly since we had on numerous occasions stated to many festigoers that we were not trying to force upon them any policy which the majority of them disagreed with. Likewise, I know that such an action would definitely result in the loss of virtually every bit of support that we have worked to achieve for the inclusion of postop women, and that we would, in fact, *deserve* to lose that support if we were to deliberately betray those women in such a manner.

Unfortunately, some transsexual women seem to not possess

the same degree of respect for the rights of the women at MWMF, and at least one of them has indicated that she will attempt to bring preop MTF transsexuals into the festival against the wishes of the majority of women there this year.

For that reason, I feel that I must now distance myself from any action that might include the possibility of bringing anyone with a penis into that festival against the wishes of the majority of the women there, and will instead participate only in an action which has as its clearly stated goal the adoption of a "no penis" policy. I feel that to be involved in any action which might result in bringing anyone into that festival whom the majority of women there disapprove of would constitute nothing less than a betrayal of those women; and I would rather that postop women never be allowed to attend MWMF than to betray those women or to be involved in any action that is designed to force them to adopt any policy which a majority of them disapprove of. May I suffer the fate of Orpheus if I ever betray those women in such a manner.

Kate Bornstein has defined *violence* as "a nonconsensual entering of someone else's space or person." I don't always agree with Kate about everything, but this is one instance in which I agree with her absolutely. I suppose that reasonable people can agree to disagree about whether or not nonconsensual entry into someone else's private space constitutes actual violence, but I think that it would be pretty hard to argue with the contention that if it's not actual violence, that it's at least about as close to it as one can possibly get. I don't think that any reasonable person could argue that, at the very least, such behavior would constitute an inexcusable *violation* of someone else's right to privacy. Therefore, I don't think that it's in any way reasonable to argue that for anyone with a penis to enter MWMF or any other women-only space in which a majority of women oppose their presence, is justifiable in any way. It is not an act of civil disobedience -- as I have heard it described by one person -- for someone to enter a space in which he or she has no moral right to be in the first place.

I unequivocally support the right of the women at MWMF, and at any other private "women-only" space, to define the term *woman* in whatever manner that they deem appropriate; and *yes*, I most certainly do likewise support their right to define that term to exclude postoperative transsexual women as well if that is what a clear majority of them truly want, if this decision is genuinely arrived at through feminist process, and if this exclusion is clearly and unambiguously stated.

However, that is presently *not* what is happening at MWMF. Presently, the women at MWMF are being *denied* the right to make that decision, and that decision is instead being made entirely by the producers. At the present time, a *minority* definition of *woman* is being imposed upon a clearly overwhelming majority of women who disagree with that definition, while simultaneously being characterized as "feminist process," and the exclusion is not being clearly and unambiguously stated.

This is not to say that feminist process is identical to majority rule -- it is not -- but merely to say that any process that very clearly ignores the wishes and concerns of the majority and allows them no voice whatsoever in the decision making process, -- even going so far as to conceal its policy for fifteen years so as to effectively prevent any discussion of it -- and instead governs essentially by edict, and relies entirely on appeals to patriarchal authority to justify its right to govern in such a manner, is definitely *not* feminist process.

Persons who say that anyone who identifies as a woman has an intrinsic right to be in any women-only space, even if the majority of the women there disapprove of those persons being there, would in fact be doing exactly the same thing that is presently being done; that is, imposing a minority definition of *woman* upon a majority that disagrees with that definition. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

The right of women in women-only space to define *woman* as they deem appropriate is something that, to me, seems intrinsic to any kind of feminist consciousness; that anyone who does not support such a right is demonstrating very fundamental disrespect not only for women's rights, for women's space and for feminist values, but also for women themselves. Nevertheless, some MTF transsexuals seem to have adopted the position that they have some sort of an intrinsic right to be in any space that is designated as "women's space," regardless of their surgical status, regardless of whether or not nudity takes place there, regardless of how the majority of the women in that space feel about that, and regardless of any other factor whatsoever. In effect, what these persons are doing is *demanding* that everyone else accept them as women simply because they say they are women.

In her book, *Gender Outlaw*, Kate Bornstein writes about a certain sense of male entitlement that some MTF transsexuals retain even after undergoing transsexual surgery. This is not to be confused with "male privilege." I don't agree with the argument made by some feminist critics of transsexuality that anyone born with a penis is necessarily the recipient of a greater degree of privilege in life than someone who is not born with a penis, but I do believe that all persons born with penises in this society do acquire some degree of male socialization; and that this sense of male entitlement that Kate refers to is an inevitable byproduct of that socialization, regardless of whatever degree of privilege that person may or may not have received. I would be engaging in gross self-deception if I were to attempt to claim that I had never in my life exhibited the sense of male entitlement that Kate describes.

I can't conceive of any more perfect example of this sense of male entitlement that some MTF transsexuals retain even years after surgery than the attitude that they have some sort of intrinsic right to be in the private space of a group of women -- the overwhelming majority of whom do not want them to be there, and who go there with the specific intention of getting away from men -- and to tell these women that if they do not want to have to see a penis there that they just need to get over it.

When I hear other transsexuals expressing such sentiments, I have little wonder why some women are opposed to transsexuals of any sort being at any kind of women's events. It is attitudes such as this that provide substantiation for the kind of charges

that Janice Raymond makes against transsexuals in her book *The Transsexual Empire*. I am quite literally horrified when I hear such sentiments being expressed by other transsexuals. It is almost as if my fellow Neopagans were to suddenly start saying, "Well, yes we do kidnap babies and kill them and drink their blood during our rituals, but it is our religious right to do so, and if you have a problem with that, then you need to just get over it." Essentially, what these transsexuals are saying to the women at MWMF is: "*You* don't get to decide who gets to attend this festival; *I* get to decide." Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

While I do believe that it is appropriate for MTF transsexuals -- both preop and postop -- to stand up for their right to be at any women-only event at which they are welcomed by a majority of women, and to not allow themselves to be effectively excluded by a minority which objects to their presence, I also believe that any claim to feminist consciousness clearly requires of all MTF transsexuals that we realize that no private women-only organization or event has any intrinsic obligation to admit transsexuals, and to be extremely grateful to the nontranssexual women who do allow us into their spaces, and to be respectful of those that do not.

It is not the women who don't want to see a penis at a women's festival who have anything to get over, it is the incredibly overweening sense of male entitlement demonstrated by those who are presently telling them to just get over it that needs to be gotten over. If what the trans rights movement is going to become about is telling women who don't want to have see a penis at a women's festival that they need to get over it, then *adios, saranoya, averiderci*, baby. I'm outta here; it's not my revolution.

Persons who take the position that MWMF and other women-only spaces must accept preop MTF transsexuals justify their position by stating that being a man or a woman has nothing whatsoever to do with genitals; that it is merely a matter of what one identifies as that determines whether one is a man or a woman, and that "we must respect each person's right to self-definition." However, what this position fails to recognize is that, just as the right to swing one's fist through the air ends at the point that that fist encounters someone else's chin, so too does the right of self-definition end at the point that it impinges upon someone else's self-definition. Or, to put it another way, the right to self-definition ends at the point that it becomes appropriation of someone else's identity. Essentially, what this means is that the right to individual self-definition is subordinate to the right to group self-definition; and that the right to individual self-definition does not include the obligation that anyone else accept that self-definition. Furthermore, it means that the right to group self-definition includes the right to define itself in a manner that does not include anyone else whom that group does not want it to include. To state otherwise is essentially the same as telling someone else: "*You* don't get to define you, *I* get to define you." Meet the new boss; same as the old boss.

Proponents of this position have also attempted to justify it by stating that "what's in someone's pants is nobody else's business." Anyone who takes this position is, in effect, telling the women at MWMF that they do not have the right to decide what criteria they deem appropriate for entry into that festival. What's in someone's pants most certainly *is* the business of the women at MWMF if they decide that it is, for the simple reason that they have the right to decide what criteria they deem appropriate and what they deem not appropriate. Moreover, in a situation such as MWMF, it very clearly *is* an appropriate criteria because of the obvious fact that nudity takes place there; thus what's "in someone's pants" is not necessarily in someone's pants.

This "nobody's business" position seems especially arrogant to me when I hear it stated in relation to an event in which nudity and/or sex takes place. Would proponents of such a position say this to the women at the women's bathhouses in San Francisco? Though, to be fair, perhaps what they mean by that is that it's okay for persons with penises to be at MWMF if they keep their penises in their pants, though given the inordinately arrogant attitudes I have seen displayed, I sincerely doubt that they would find such a standard acceptable. The fact that they have essentially told women who don't want to have to see a penis at that festival that they need to get over it is proof enough that they don't. But if this is in fact an accurate assessment of their position, what they are in effect saying is that what's in one's pants *does* matter; because if it truly didn't matter, then it would not need to be kept in one's pants.

An example of this overweening sense of male entitlement was recently displayed in a transsexual newsletter which described protest actions taken by a New York City transsexual activist organization against an S&M lesbian organization for adopting the "dick in the drawer" rule -- which means that it is open to anyone who does not have a penis -- derisively referring to this policy as a "panty-check;" and then went on to castigate the S&M lesbian conference Powersurge for practicing "the same discriminatory shit," and threatened to "picket their asses" because of this policy.

Essentially, what transsexuals who take this position are saying to lesbians is: "*You* don't get to decide who you can have sex or get naked with; *I* get to decide," which is exactly what the people with penises have been telling the ones without penises for several millennia now. Meet the new boss; same as the old boss. As far as I'm concerned, if what the "transgender revolution" is all about is the folks with penises telling the ones without who they can and who they can't have sex or get naked with, you can count me out; it's not my revolution.

There is absolutely no doubt that allowing persons with penises into MWMF would drastically alter the nature of that festival, and not for the better. Anyone who says otherwise is simply dismissing out of hand the legitimate claims of the women at that festival. If MWMF were to adopt a policy that allowed anyone to enter regardless of genital status, such a policy would inevitably create a loophole big enough for any man who wanted to enter the festival to do so with impunity, thus not only creating a legitimate safety concern for the women there, but likewise compromising the woman-only nature of the event.

To anyone who thinks that men would not enter if the festival if such a opportunity existed, I ask, "What planet are you living on?" Anyone who thinks that there are no men who would not take advantage of such an opportunity must certainly know of an entirely different species of men than I have ever encountered. There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that there are a great many men who are extremely curious about what goes on at that festival and who would most certainly take advantage of an opportunity to enter it if it presented itself. After I was expelled from the festival in 1993 and camped out across the road, there was in fact a local man who stopped by and talked with us who told us that very thing. I also have no doubt that there are drag queens who would take advantage of such an opportunity because they thought that it would be a "hoot."

When I have mentioned this possibility to others on previous occasions, it has usually been simply dismissed out of hand as something that would never happen. To those people, I say: You've heard of the law of diminishing returns, the law of unintended consequences, the Peter Principle and Murphy's Law? Well, you can now add to that list of auspicious precepts Davina's Dictum, which is: As soon as you say something will never happen, it will happen. To anyone who thinks that this would never happen, I say go back and read Mustang Sally's article "Smells Like Teen Pussy" in *TransSisters # 7*, in which she recounts an instance of a male crossdresser seeking admittance to her women's rap group on days that he "felt like a woman."

Several years ago, the rock star Pete Townsend revealed that he had had several sexual affairs with other men, which of course, is nothing unusual; by now we're all used to revelations of bisexuality by rock stars. But what was unusual about this particular revelation was that he then went on to say that because he had had sex with men, that he therefore knew what it is like to be a woman because having sex with men means that he *is* a woman. Well, personally, I don't care if Pete Townsend sucks every cock on Earth five times a day; that doesn't make him a woman in my book, and I don't know of too many women who would consider Pete Townsend, or any other gay or bisexual man, to be a woman just because he happened to have sex with other men. However, according to the definition of *woman* that some transsexuals are now demanding that MWMF and all other women-only spaces adopt; that is "anyone who identifies as a woman," if Pete Townsend, or any other gay or bisexual man, were to walk up to the box office and ask for a ticket to MWMF, he would have to be given one on the basis that he identifies as a woman. In fact, all that *anyone* would have to do to get into MWMF or any such similar space would be to walk up to the box office and claim to be a woman, and that person would have to be admitted on that basis.

Now, I don't know of too many women at MWMF or at any other women-only event who would approve of the idea of allowing Pete Townsend or any other gay or bisexual man entrance into that space simply because they think that having sex with other men makes them women. In fact, I think that if MWMF were to adopt such a policy, somewhere around ninety-five percent of the women who currently attend it would no longer do so, in which case that festival would simply cease to exist.

Yet there are actually some MTF transsexuals who are so adamant in their insistence that they have some sort of intrinsic right to be in any women-only space regardless of their surgical status and regardless of how the women in that space feel about that, and regardless of whether nudity takes place there or not, that they would actually prefer to see any event or any space that denies them admittance cease to exist.

This particular topic came up several months ago on the Transsexual Lesbians message board on America Online. When I wrote on that message board that if MWMF were to adopt a policy that allowed anyone who self-identifies as a woman to enter that festival, regardless of surgical status, that around ninety-five percent of the women there would cease attending it, one preop transsexual wrote in response that if that were the case that it would be better for MWMF to go out of existence, and that if that were the way that women felt, that such sentiments proved that MWMF is a "hotbed of hatred and paranoia." My response to that message was that I hoped that this person isn't expecting to achieve very much acceptance within the lesbian community because she certainly isn't going to achieve it with attitudes such as that, regardless of surgical status, because the women at MWMF are fairly representative of the lesbian community as a whole. Moreover, such attitudes are just another example of the typically self-centered male thinking that the world revolves around oneself and that everyone else's concerns are irrelevant. This individual even went so far as to say, "Why should the rights of 7000 women matter more than *my* rights?" Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

In the afterward to the paperback edition of *Gender Outlaw*, Kate Bornstein states that at this time in history the concerns of the women's movement must take precedence over those of the trans movement, and I couldn't agree with that more. I would likewise expect nothing less from anyone who claims to be a woman. I can't imagine a more perfect example of putting one's own personal concerns and the concerns of transsexuals before those of the women's movement as a whole than the sentiment that it would be better for a women-only event to cease to exist than for it to not allow oneself to be included in it, and that the so-called "rights" of one individual should take precedence over those of 7000 women. Moreover, my personal feeling is that if any preoperative MTF transsexual exhibits such an attitude during transition, I would be entirely in favor of denying that individual admittance to into any women's organization that I'm a member of when she is postop as well. If what the trans movement is going to become about is putting its concerns above those of the women's movement as a whole, and putting the concerns of the individual above those of the group, then once again, you can count me out; it's not my revolution.

To say that the only acceptable definition of woman is "anyone who self-identifies as a woman" is to say that *woman* can not be defined, that the definition of *woman* must be left up to each individual person. What proponents of this position are telling women is that they must adopt a definition of *woman* that can mean anything that anyone wants it to mean, and is thus

*meaningless*. To tell women that they can only have a definition of *woman* that is meaningless is the same as telling them that they can have women-only space in name only, but that they can't actually exclude anyone; and that is essentially the same as telling them that they can't really have women-only space at all. Any transsexual who would tell women that they can't have women-only space at all, or that they can only have a definition of *woman* that is meaningless, is undeniably putting the concerns of transsexuals above the concerns of the women's movement as a whole. The women at MWMF have every right to define *woman* in a manner that *means something* -- something that is not open to interpretation -- and the only way to do that is to have *objective* and *verifiable* criteria as to who is a woman and who is not.

One of the shortcomings of the "womyn born womyn" policy is that, to a certain extent, it is necessarily dependent on subjective critieria. However, the "all self-identified women" policy would simply replace a policy that is partially dependent on subjective criteria with one that is *entirely* subjective. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

Some advocates of the "all self-identified women" policy would say to this, "Well, so what if they're there if they don't harm anyone? Shouldn't admittance be based on behavior and not physical characteristics?" To that, I say that behavior certainly is a relevant criterion, and that I would certainly be in favor of excluding anyone who behaves in a violent, threatening or abusive manner, regardless of what that person's genital status is. However, I do not think that behavior is the *only* legitimate criterion on which to exclude someone. *Any* criterion which is necessary to the operation of the festival, and to preserving its women-only character is an appropriate basis on which to base admittance. In this case, the "all self-identified women" policy clearly compromises the women-only nature of the event by creating an opportunity for any man who wishes to do so to enter the festival. How well that man behaves is absolutely and entirely irrelevant. I have a great many male friends, whom I consider to be kind, gentle and very respectful of women, and who are not at all even interested in women sexually, but whom I still would not want to be at a women's festival.

Furthermore, this position does not in any way make me a bigot, as I have heard it suggested. Not wanting to have to see a penis at a women's festival does not mean that one automatically assumes that anyone with a penis is going to commit rape or any other violent acts. However, if what the trans rights movement is going to become about is telling people who don't want to see a penis at a women's festival that they are bigots, then once again, you can count me out; it's not my revolution.

Advocates of the "all self-identified women" policy try to characterize this sentiment as "penisphobia," which they define as "an unnatural fear of penises." However, this entirely spurious idea of "penisphobia" is in fact nothing but total and utter bullshit, and one that needs to be laid to rest once and for all.

One of the tactics that has traditionally been employed by rigid ideologues of all sorts to enforce their viewpoints on others is to attempt to characterize particular beliefs that they disagree with as psychopathologies. This particular practice was carried to its most extreme in the Soviet Union, where opinions which diverged from the official Soviet party line were branded as "anti-Soviet psychosis," and was used as a pretext for committing political dissidents to mental institutions.

Persons who characterize women who don't want to have to see a penis at a women's festival are doing exactly the same thing; that is, attempting to characterize such persons as suffering from some sort of psychopathology. However, if one is to characterize the desire to be able to have penis-free space as a psychopathology, one might as well characterize lesbianism itself as a psychopathology. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

Dislike of penises is practically intrinsic to lesbianism. As Mustang Sally pointed out in her article "The A.B.C.s of T.G. P.C.," there's only one group of people who think there's something wrong with you if you don't like penises; and that is men. Lesbians don't have to justify their dislike of penises or their desire to have penis-free space to *anybody;* and any movement that tells them that they have to do so is definitely not my revolution. In fact, it is one that I will work actively *against*.

It's not that women who want to occasionally gather together in penis-free space are "penisphobic," but rather that persons who tell them that they need to just get over it are actually *apenisphobic*, that is, have an unnatural fear of being in a space where there are no penises present, probably as a result of being raised in a highly patriarchal culture. Now *that's* something that some folks really do need to get over.

Some persons have suggested that preop MTF transsexuals should be allowed to enter MWMF if they have a letter from a psychologist or psychiatrist verifying that they are indeed preop transsexuals. However, such letters are incredibly easy to forge; anyone with a computer could very easily forge such a letter. And what do they expect the women at the gate to do, anyway; to make a long distance call to each individual psychologist every time someone shows up with such a letter? Even if that were feasible, how do they know the person on the other end of the line is genuine? But more to the point, such a suggestion ignores the central issue of the matter; that is; that if the women at MWMF don't want persons with penises there, then they have absolutely no obligation whatsoever to have to admit them.

Moreover, advocates of the "all self-identified women" policy are not being honest with the women at MWMF because what they are actually saying to them is that they are advocating an "all women welcome" policy, but they are not being up front about the fact that what they mean by that is anyone who identifies as a woman, regardless of that person's genitals. However, what most women at MWMF interpret "all women welcome," to mean is anyone who is legally and anatomically female. Advocates of the "all self-identified women" policy have an obligation to tell women exactly what they are really advocating; otherwise they are engaging in the same kind of linguistic deception that the producers are with their "womyn born womyn" language. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

In the many conversations I have had with women at MWMF

about the issue of transsexual inclusion, I have noticed that a certain phrase has come up in a number of conversations, and that phrase is "irrevocable commitment;" that is, the women at MWMF generally feel that MTF transsexuals who have undergone surgery have made an "irrevocable commitment" to being women; whereas those who have not undergone surgery have not yet made such an irrevocable commitment. Now this is not a defense of postop inclusion that I have offered in my own defense; this is a sentiment that has obviously arisen among the women at MWMF themselves. The recurrence of this phrase would suggest to me that it is something that that they have discussed among themselves and is representative of the sentiments of a great many of the women there. I support their right to make this distinction absolutely.

Women in this society have every right to expect that anyone born and raised as a male in this society should have to make an "irrevocable commitment" to being a woman before being allowed to attend an event such as MWMF; and they are likewise entirely entitled to define "irrevocable commitment" as undergoing transsexual surgery.

Critics of such a distinction might argue that transsexual surgery is no more of an irrevocable commitment than merely living as a woman (while, of course, simultaneously arguing in a different context that merely taking hormones constitutes "irreversible sex-change"). Of course, it is technically true that a postop transsexual woman could go back to being a male by undergoing female-to-male transsexual surgery. However, this is extremely unlikely; in fact, the likelihood of it is practically nonexistent. In all my years as a transsexual, I have only even *heard of* one other person who even expressed a desire to do this, and I don't think that she actually went through with it. The fact of the matter is that a postop transsexual woman is far less likely to undergo FTM transsexual surgery than is a nontranssexual woman. In fact, it is not at all unreasonable to say that postop transsexual women are the *least* likely people on Earth to desire such surgery. Furthermore, it is nothing less than ludicrous to suggest that transsexual surgery is as easily reversible as is merely living as a woman. So even though transsexual surgery is technically, not absolutely "irrevocable," it is undoubtedly the most irrevocable commitment to being a woman that one can possibly make; and the women at MWMF are entirely within their rights, and not in the least bit unreasonable, to expect transsexual women to make the most irrevocable commitment to being a woman that one can possibly make before being allowed to attend that festival.

I do want to clarify here that by saying this that I am not saying that undergoing transsexual surgery is the *only* appropriate standard for womanhood in *every* context, or the only acceptable definition of "irrevocable commitment," but merely that it is *an* appropriate standard for womanhood. If women in other women-only spaces decide that a less stringent standard is acceptable, or to define "irrevocable commitment" in some other way, then they are certainly within their rights to do so, but I will not fault in any way any lesbian or women-only organization or event for adopting a postop only policy in regard to MTF transsexuals.

Some women have argued that a "no penis" policy is unacceptable because Leslie Feinberg has expressed opposition to it. Now, I certainly have a great deal of respect and admiration for Leslie and a great deal of appreciation for all of the work that she has done on behalf of transsexuals and other transpersons. However, I am not about to concede powers of infallibility to her or to anyone else on the face of the Earth. I had quite enough of Popes and their patriarchal claims of infallibility when I was a Catholic, and that's one reason why I no longer am one. However, it never ceases to amaze me that, even among supposedly free-thinking, independent-minded people, who in many cases have turned their backs on dogmatic institutions, that there still exists a tendency to attribute powers of infallibility to particular individuals with whom their beliefs are more aligned. Perhaps this tendency is a remnant of patriarchal socialization. I presently see a great deal of this tendency within the trans rights movement, particularly in regard to Leslie Feinberg. I frequently hear people citing something that Leslie has said as if the mere fact that she said it means that it must be true. Personally, I agree with Leslie on a great many issues -- certainly a great many more than I disagree with her on -- but I do not agree that something is true simply because she says that it is; and when I do disagree with her I will not be afraid to say so. If I have to align my beliefs to be in lockstep with anyone else's -- even someone whom I admire and respect as much as Leslie -- then it's not my revolution.

Last year at Camp Trans, Leslie stated that she is opposed to a biological definition of *woman* because she considers it reactionary; that it is a throwback. However, this interpretation is based on the erroneous equation of a *biological* definition with a *biologically deterministic* definition. However, *biological* and *biologically deterministic* are not the same thing at all. In order for something to be biologically deterministic, two elements must be present: biology and determinism. Biological determinism means that an individual's destiny is determined by that particular individual's biology; that having a particular biology limits what that individual is capable of accomplishing. However, a biological definition simply means that someone has a particular biology; it says nothing whatsoever about what that individual's capabilities. Thus, a biological definition of *woman* is not at all the same thing as a biologically deterministic definition of *woman*. To say that a woman is someone who has a particular biology says absolutely nothing whatsoever about the capabilities of women. Likewise, any definition which recognizes that biology can be changed can not be accurately characterized as deterministic. Since the women at MWMF are entitled to have objective and verifiable criteria as to what constitutes a woman, the only way to accomplish that is according to a biological definition of *woman*.

It is not a biological definition of *woman* that is reactionary or oppressive. A biological definition of woman is not a throwback to anything because patriarchal society has never had a definition of *woman* that is truly only biological, but has instead always coupled biology with determinism. But it is not the

biological part of that definition that is reactionary and oppressive; rather it is the part of that definition of *woman* that is based on conformity to gender roles that is reactionary and oppressive.

Leslie is absolutely correct when she says that women are not going to liberate themselves by picking up the tired old weapon of biological determinism, but so is it also undeniably true that women are certainly not going to liberate themselves by picking up the rusty sword of essentialism -- that is, the belief that there are particular psychological or emotional qualities or combinations of such qualities which make one a man or a woman -- either, whether that essentialism be biological or otherwise. I do not see how the identity=being position can be anything other than an essentialist position, and I haven't yet heard a single convincing argument to the contrary. However, a definition of *woman* that is merely biological, and which recognizes that biology can be changed, is neither biologically deterministic or essentialist.

Likewise, while Leslie made a very good case as to why the women's movement as a whole should be open to anyone who identifies as a woman, it does not therefore automatically follow that what is appropriate for the women's movement as a whole is necessarily appropriate for women-only space. The women's movement and women-only space are not the same thing. *Of course* anyone who identifies as a woman should be welcomed in the women's movement. In fact, I say anyone who supports the goals of the women's movement should be welcomed into it, even persons who don't identify as women. But one of the things that support for the rights of women at this time in history entails is support for the right of women to have women-only space; and intrinsic to that right is the right for each particular women-only space to define *woman* as it deems appropriate. Without the later, the former is effectively rendered meaningless.

Furthermore, if a biological definition of *woman* is unacceptable at MWMF, there are only two other alternatives. One is to define *woman* according to conformity to gender roles (i.e., occupation, dress, etc.) and the other is to define it according to identity. The first is clearly far more reactionary than a biological definition. Freeing women from gender roles has been the primary goal of the feminist movement since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century; to return to defining *woman* according to conformity to gender roles would effectively erase the entire contemporary feminist movement. The other definition of *woman* is essentially the same as no definition at all since it can mean anything that anyone wants it to mean; thus rendering the word *woman* meaningless, and thus, denying the women at MWMF the right to define themselves collectively.

Some persons have argued that no definition of *woman* at all is precisely the very definition that is most liberating to women. In fact, this premise is the foundation of much of transgender theory. It very well may be that no definition is indeed the most liberating definition of *woman* for women as a whole. However, this is certainly not something that the trans movement has *proven* beyond all doubt to be case, though to witness the dogmatic obduracy with which some transpersons propound on it, one would think that it has been as firmly established in the realm of incontrovertible fact as the Law of Gravity. This premise is, after all, still *theory*, and no group of individuals has a right to impose its theoretical framework upon another. This is exactly what the producers of MWMF are effectively doing now with their "womyn born womyn" policy. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

Personally, I think that it's rather naive to think that genitals will ever eventually be entirely irrelevant to the ways in which humans identify and define themselves; but moreover, there seems to me something inherently contradictory about a movement whose stated goal is the right of self-definition saying that one *can not* base one's identity on having a particular type of body or freely associate with others on the basis of such an identity. If what the trans movement is going to become about is telling people that they *can't* have identities based on what kind of bodies they have or freely associate with one another on the basis of such identities, then just count me out; it's not my revolution.

But regardless of that, if one's objective is to eliminate all sexual and gender categories, MWMF is *not* the place to begin that process. MWMF is quite literally, the *last* place on Earth to try to accomplish that. Beginning the process of eliminating all sexual and gender categories at MWMF is like trying to eliminate sexual and racial discrimination by eliminating affirmative action programs. MWMF is, in fact, a kind of self-created affirmative action program for women; and until sexism, misogyny and inequality cease to exist, there will be a need for spaces like MWMF, and as long as there remains a need for spaces such as MWMF, then the women who attend it will have a right to define who it is for.

Likewise, just as affirmative action programs based on race are appropriate at this time in history -- even if some members of particular races may in fact be less disadvantaged than individuals of other races who aren't the beneficiaries of those programs -- so too is it appropriate for persons who don't have penises to create affirmative action programs for themselves, even if some persons who do have penises may in fact be even more disadvantaged than some who don't because, overall, the people with penises still have the overwhelming majority of the power in the world.

Persons who are presently insisting on an "all self-identified women" policy have also attempted to justify their position by citing Ethnomethodological research which has demonstrated that there have existed in many ancient cultures throughout the world individuals who had penises who were considered to be women in those cultures, claiming that this "proves" that being a man or a woman is merely a matter of self-identification. However, this is a kind of fundamentalist interpretation of Ethnomethodology.

What proponents of this argument neglect to mention is that in these cultures, *woman* did not simply mean anything that anyone wanted it to mean either. In every one of these cultures, there were very precise meanings of *woman*, and in every one of those cultures *woman* was defined as conformity to particular gender roles. It was *not* simply a matter of identifying as a woman. Likewise, in each of those cultures, there were specific requirements for changing one's status from that of a man to that

of a woman. There was typically some sort of screening process, a transition period and an initiation, and the individual was not considered to be a woman until after undergoing such an initiation.

Moreover, one can not simply extract one practice from one culture, plop it down wholesale into another culture (or subculture), and say that because it is appropriate in one culture that it is therefore appropriate in another culture in exactly the same way. This is like transplanting organs from a person with one blood type into the body of a person with a different blood type. So while a definition of *woman* that is based on conformity to gender roles may very well have been appropriate for societies in which a strict division of labor was necessary to the effective functioning of that culture, it is hardly an appropriate definition for a postindustrial society in which gender roles have been rendered obsolete. Likewise what may have been empowering to women in such cultures is not necessarily so in contemporary culture.

While Ethnomethodology does demonstrate that it is beneficial for societies to have some means for individuals to transfer from one category to another, it also demonstrates that the precise ways in which this is accomplished differ from one society to another, and that those specific means need to be appropriate to each particular society. The "all self-identified women" policy clearly fails this crucial test in regard to MWMF, and instead tries to impose a "one size fits all" model upon it.

Ethnomethodology does not demonstrate that being a woman is merely a matter of identifying as a woman, but that there is no absolute definition of *woman*, and that that definition varies among cultures. Persons who claim that the "all self-identified women" policy is the *only* acceptable standard for determining womanhood are in fact being every bit as dogmatic and intolerant as persons who say that the "womyn born womyn" standard is the only acceptable standard. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

Some advocates of the "all self-identified women" policy argue that to require someone to undergo transsexual surgery before being able to be admitted into women-only space is "classist." I don't agree. A criterion can not be accurately described as "classist" unless it is *specifically intended* to exclude persons on the basis of social class, not merely on a basis that merely *intersects* with social class. Practically *everything* intersects with social class; but moreover, even if a particular criterion does intersect with social class, if it serves some other necessary function that has nothing to do with social class, then it can not be accurately described as "classist." A perfect example of this is the practice of charging admission.

Obviously, the fact that MWMF charges an admission price automatically forecloses the possibility of many women being able to attend it, and it likewise undeniably disproportionately impacts upon poor women, many of whom are poor because of societal injustices. Yet, it is also very obvious that it would not be possible for MWMF to exist if it did not charge admission. Therefore, it is *not* classist for MWMF to charge admission, even if it does impact disproportionately upon poor women, because it is necessary for it to do so in order for it to exist.

Moreover, lack of money is not the only reason that one might not be able to obtain surgery. Nor is social class necessarily correlated with operative status. I know of postop transsexuals who have four figure incomes and of preop transsexuals who have six figure incomes. The mere fact that a "no penis" policy would allow the former, but not the later, to attend disproves that the charge that the policy is "classist." Likewise, I have known a great many persons of very modest means who have somehow been able to obtain transsexual surgery, and not by resorting to prostitution either. It may have taken them several years to do so, but I don't think that it is unreasonable for nontranssexual women to expect transsexuals to transition for several years before being able to attend an event such as MWMF.

Thus, a "no penis" policy would serve a very important purpose necessary to the functioning of MWMF that has nothing to do with social class; that is, to provide objective and verifiable criteria as to what is a woman. Moreover, it serves the purpose of insuring that persons who are born male in this society, and have thus experienced some degree of male socialization, have undergone a period of transition -- something which is entirely appropriate for women in any women-only space to expect -- before being allowed into the festival.

The lack of access to transsexual surgery is undeniably unfair to a great many individuals who would genuinely benefit from it. However, it is the lack of access to surgery that is unfair, and not the policy that would require persons to undergo it before being admitted to MWMF that is unfair. The lack of access to transsexual surgery is in no way the fault of MWMF; nor is it the obligation of MWMF to ameliorate it or any other societal inequity.

Some persons will undoubtedly be saying right now that it's very easy for me to say this; that I am arguing from a "position of privilege," and that I would not be saying this if I were being excluded. Such a criticism is obviously not true because of the simple fact that before I underwent surgery I never felt that I had any right to be in any women-only space if the women did not want me to be there. But, for those who would make such a criticism, I would also like to relate another experience of mine which proves otherwise.

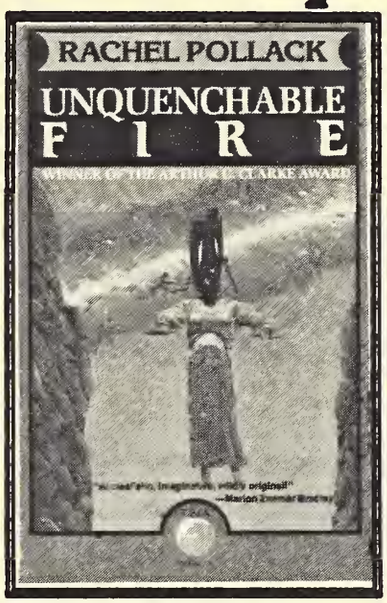
Several years ago, I was one of two transsexual women involved in a campaign to persuade the Kansas City, Missouri City Council to enact a nondiscrimination ordinance that would protect persons on the basis of sexual orientation. We suggested to the other people involved in that effort that we should expand the definition of sexual orientation to include transsexuality, and we were successful in persuading the other members of our organization to agree to that. We were able to find a Councilwoman who would sponsor our legislation and who would agree to transsexual inclusion, and we spent many long hours working to persuade other City Council members to support that definition.

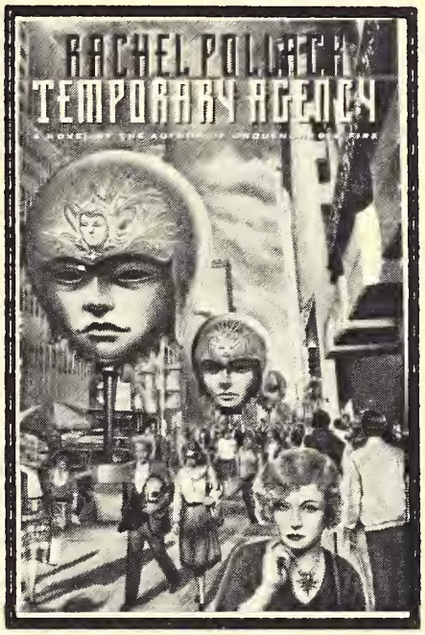
However, before the measure could be voted on by the full City Council, it first had to be ***(continued on page 64)***

# Unquestionably Fine

***Unquenchable Fire* by Rachel Pollack. Woodstock, New York : Overlook Press, 1992. paperback. 390 pages. $13.95. (originally published in London by Century Publishers, 1988)**
***Temporary Agency* by Rachel Pollack.. New York City: St. Martin's Press, 1994. 202 pages, $18.95.**

## *reviewed by Davina Anne Gabriel*




Rachel Pollack's most recent novel, *Temporary Agency*, is a wildly imaginisitc foray into the same remarkably intricate, multi-layered, mythopoeic world which she so skillfully created in her Arthur C. Clarke Award winning novel *Unquenchable Fire*.

In *Unquenchable Fire*, Rachel created a postrevolutionary America in which spirituality has triumphed over materialism in the lives of its inhabitants -- in which women have gained equality with men, in which storytellers are the superstars of the day, in which dreams are regarded as oracles, in which religious rituals, magic, tribalism and shamanism are interwoven into the very fabric of the everyday lives of its inhabitants, in which in which the very Jungian archetypes are brought into full manifestion in conscious reality. It is a highly complex, richly textured and deeply sensous world in which the realm of the sacred freely intermingles with the realm of the mundane.

> ***"Rachel's vision of the future is . . . one that is informed by a deeply spiritual and profoundly feminist sensibility."***

But this postrevolutionary neospiritual America is no sterile or pollyannaish Utopia. Despite the triumph of spirituality, the inhabitants of this brave new world still find themselves subject to all of the same foibles to which all flesh is heir -- deceit, corruption, petty jealousy, hubris, and every other imperfection that presently besets the human condition.

Yet, both novels offer a vision of the future of humanity that is, above all else, indominatably hopeful. Thus, Rachel has achieved the singular accomplishment of transcending the boundaries of the unrelentingly dreary, technologically dominated, *Blade Runner* type futuristic cyberpunk presentiments which have come to dominate the sci-fi/fantasy genre. Rachel's vision of the future is a much richer and far more interesting one; it is a vision in which the human spirit is able to triumph above the most formidable adversity, and one that is informed by a deeply spiritual and profoundly feminist sensibility. Just as Rachel turned the male-dominated idiom of comic book writing inside out and upside down by infusing it with her visionary feminist sensibility with *Doom Patrol*, so has she done with the realm of science-fiction/fantasy with these two extraordinary novels.

*Temproary Agency* is not a sequel to *Unquenchable Fire*, because it gives us an entirely different cast of characters, but reading *Unquenchable Fire* first is highly recommended, as it provides one with a deeper and richer understanding of the milieu of *Temporary Agency* that might not seem as entirely fleshed out on the basis of reading *Temporary Agency* alone.

Whereas *Unquenchable Fire* was a psychological-mytheopoeic *tour de force* roller-coaster excursion into the realm of the unconscious, *Temporary Agency* is a futuristic science-fiction/fantasy coming-of-age Nancy Drew detective story. But while*Temproary Agency* lacks the panoramic breadth and intricate multi-layered complexity of *Unquenchable Fire*, it compensates for it in terms of action and intrigue, and is in every way an entirely worthy successor. Whereas, transsexual and transgender themes, as well as overt lesbian content, were very subtly woven below the surface of *Unquenchable Fire*, they have assumed a more prominent position in *Temporary Agency*, perhaps reflecting the ascendency of the queer and trans movements in the interval between their publications.

Both books are highly fascinating and powerfully gripping tales that draw the reader into them with the same spell-binding skill that the superstar storytellers of the her futuristic America are able to hold their audiences rapt with. Rachel's imagry is bold, hallucenogenic and vivid. These are images that practically leap off the page. Both are likewise profoundly insightful forays into the depths of the human mind that can be appreciated on a number of different levels. Both are indispensible reading for anyone interested in exploring the mythical and religious aspects of transsexuality and transgenderism, yet are fully appreciable merely on the level of science-fiction/fantasy adventure stories. *Unquenchable Fire* is a masterpiece of the genre, and both it and its successor are two extraordinary works by one of the most prolific and talented individuals within the transsexual community, and a spell-binding master storyteller in any realm.

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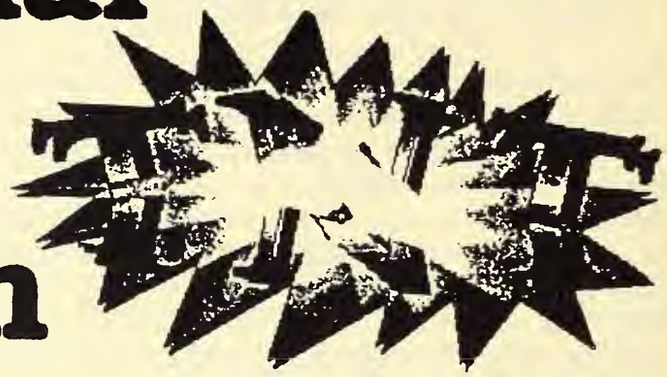

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# ARCHETYPAL TRANSSEXUALITY

***by Rachel Pollack***

The San Rafael Hospital in Trinidad, Colorado has become a kind of shrine for transsexual people in America. Even for those who did not get surgery from Dr. Stanley Biber, his clinic in San Rafael has become synonymous with "sex reassignment surgery" in the same way that the entire nation of Denmark came to symbolize "sex changes" in the 1950s and 1960s, after Christine Jorgensen stepped out of Copenhagen and into the world.

A small hill rises behind the hospital, and on top of it, surrounded by trees and flowers, stands a genuine shrine, a small structure dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Behind a conventional statue of Mary, with room for candles and other offerings, the building houses a more precious sculpture of the Christian Goddess. According to the plaque at the front of the shrine, a Trinidad man was caught in a blizzard and in danger of being blown away when he came upon the statue of Mary and clung to it until the fury of nature broke open and he could find his way to help and recovery. The sanctuary he created looks over Dr. Biber's clinic, gently blessing all the trans-formed women and men who pass through its doors.

Now, Mary occupies an interesting place in the history of mythology. Many people know that while the Christian Church attempted to portray God as entirely male, the ordinary people clung to Mother Mary as the giver of hope, mercy, and nurturance. Less known is the fact that the early Church consciously adapted aspects of various Pagan Goddesses to create Mary's image and place her in the hearts of the people. Two Goddesses in particular contributed to Mary: Aphrodite, who rose from the sea, and Cybele, a Goddess from Asia Minor who earlier had made a triumphant entry into Rome as the Great Mother of the Gods.

I have written elsewhere of Aphrodite as a transsexual Goddess. Her story tells us how the Sky God, Ouranos, was oppressing Gaia, the Earth, until Gaia gave a sickle (a women's harvest tool shaped like the crescent Moon) to her son Kronos. Kronos cut off his father's genitals and threw them into the sea. Ouranos does not die in the story, but withdraws into the shadows, the same way the male persona of many transsexual women will withdraw once the female reality has given itself permission to emerge. The severed genitals, however, do not sink out of sight. Instead, they stir up a great foam on the waters. Out of this foam, golden Aphrodite, the embodiment of femininity in all its grace and power, emerges into the world.

And Cybele -- when the Great Mother came to Rome she brought with her her Gallae. The Gallae were anatomical males who, in the midst of ecstatic group frenzy, used stone sickles to sever their own genitals, which they then flung through open doorways. The families who received the bloody relics considered them a blessing. In return for Cybele's grace, a family would tend to the bleeding Galla and nurse her back to health, at which time she ceremoniously received women's clothing and entered into the service of her Goddess.

The presence of Mary overlooking the San Rafael clinic, and in particular her mysterious emergence out of a storm, forms part of a great web of images and history. The web includes all the mythological figures who change sex or cross genders. It includes the real life Gallae and Hijras and others who alter their bodies as well as the tribal shamans who move into the roles of the "opposite" sex, usually not as a matter of conscious choice, but because the spirits demand it of them. It includes the Stone Age evidence of androgynous Goddesses and cross-sexed priests and priestesses alongside the increasing numbers of contemporary transsexuals who have begun to understand that, as Davina Anne Gabriel puts it, we cannot comprehend transsexuality without some notion of "transcendence," or, as Dallas Denny says, more bluntly, "Transsexuality is a religious experience."

To recognize our place in that web means, paradoxically, to step out of a trap. This is the trap in which we experience transsexuality as a sickness, or even just a psychological condition. For transsexual people, such an ideology (and that is what it is) has become more and more of a dead end -- literally, with so many people losing their lives to depression, suicide, bad drugs, unsafe sex and all the other miseries that allow the purveyors of pathology to say "There? You see? If it wasn't a sickness, wouldn't they all be happy?"

Even those of us who insist that transsexual people are not "sick" will still talk about "healing," whether we think we need to heal from shame, or society's oppression, or unhappy childhoods. But as long as we speak of healing we stay within the world

of sickness. In the United States we consider happiness the basic human condition, and any suffering as some sort of aberration. I would argue that transsexuality arises from a passion so powerful that it transcends issues of happiness. The word *passion* originally meant suffering, not pleasure. The suffering of transsexuality, however, is like that of religious ecstasy, or even orgasm -- overwhelming, intense, and ultimately joyous when we surrender to it and let it carry us into the power of the experience.

Think where transsexual desire leads us. We give up our positions in society (I am not talking here about the slide downwards in status for male-to-females, but much more basically of our very places in the world, a loss that applies to transsexual men as well as to women, even if the men eventually go up in status). We risk losing our family and friends. We face ridicule and sometimes extreme violence, even death. We take powerful and dangerous drugs to alter the very shape of our bodies. And finally, we undergo -- we seek out, even demand -- surgery on our genitals. No logical decision, or confusion, or social conditioning, or even mental illness, can account for such an overwhelming need.

***"Transsexuality comes to us with all the power of a divine force who will not be denied. If we recognize it and accept is as a true vision of the self from the deepest part of the psyche . . . then we may find it opens us to a life of spirituality and joy."***

Recently, a number of transsexual and transgender people have suggested that people seek surgery because of pressure from the medical profession, which convinces them that surgery will allow them to become normal members of society. I cannot believe this. I have met too many transsexuals who know very clearly that surgery is exactly and precisely what they want, and that the doctors are not their masters but their instruments.

To describe transsexual people as dupes of the medical profession, or slaves to social conditioning, or trapped in rigid ideas about gender roles, is precisely to take away our power, a power so intense that it terrifies people. Sometimes we can see the question in their faces. "What would make someone do -- or want to do -- such a thing?" And because the dual acts of changing gender and altering the body frighten them they try to think of an explanation. "He must hate himself so much." "She can't accept the role society has given her." "Her parents must have abused her." Each of these statements, and all the others, assume that the transsexual man or woman doesn't really know what he or she is doing. And more, they shift the focus from transsexuality itself to some external concept or ideology. All explanations, even friendly ones, drain away the passion of the experience.

It is time to realize that changing gender and altering the body are not the same thing. While many people cannot imagine a gender change without surgery, many others find surgery totally unnecessary. And many people who have surgery will say clearly that it is not the surgeon's knife that makes them men or women, that surgery only changes the outer form to match their inner feelings. The confusion of surgery with gender identity leads many people to think of postoperative transsexual people as superior to preops or to people who change gender without caring about surgery at all. This hierarchy is unfortunate, because it sets people against each other when there is no need for that. At the same time, it also takes away the mystery of surgery itself. Once again, it "explains" surgery as a way just to prove something, or to join an elite. But genital surgery is too strong an experience to dismiss in this way.

Gender identity is a matter of self-knowledge, but also of social functioning. We inhabit our gender and exhibit it to the world. Genital surgery is not really a social experience at all. Obviously, it becomes important in intimate sexual relationships. It may also give us more confidence, as well as legal status. Ultimately, however, surgery is private. It forms a mystery of the body. It may have more in common with religious body altering, such as ritual scarring, than with changing gender. (It is important to remember, however, that transsexual people not only desire surgery but go to great lengths to get it. This makes the experience radically different from any body altering imposed unwillingly on people, such as clitoridectomy performed on pre-adolescent girls, or even the surgery done on intersex babies.)

There is a verse in the *Tao Te Ching*, the ancient Chinese teaching on "the Way", that speaks directly to some of these issues. In the translation of Gia-fu Feng by Jane English it reads as follows:

"Knowing ignorance is strength.
Ignoring knowledge is sickness.
If one is sick of sickness, then one is not sick.
The sage is not sick because he is sick of sickness.
Therefore he is not sick."

Whenever we try to find the *cause* of our transsexuality we become weak. This is because we deny its reality within our selves and try to find some explanation outside of us. Some sickness or conditioning. If we know and accept that we are ignorant of what makes us transsexual, and that we should not waste our energy trying to pinpoint some external cause, then "knowing ignorance" will indeed become a source of strength.

But if we cannot know what causes transsexuality, we can know a great deal about it. We can acknowledge its power and its reality, we can learn about other transsexual people and their experiences, and we can discover its ancient worldwide history. To ignore all this knowledge certainly weakens us and makes us sick.

To overcome the pathology that our culture attaches to transsexuality we need, above all, to want to overcome it. To finally and utterly reject it. To become sick of sickness. At the moment that we do this, that we become sick of sickness, we begin to escape it, and the deeper we go in that direction, the greater our liberation.

Carl Jung once remarked that the ancients had gods, we have complexes. The Galla may have experienced feelings and desires similar to those of modern transsexual women. After all, since no one chose them to be Gallae, they must have felt the same

overwhelming push to present themselves. But instead of seeing themselves as compelled by a sickness, they believed their Goddess had called them into Her service. Both viewpoints require a surrender, but when we surrender to a Goddess we join ourselves to her power and her beauty. When we surrender to a sickness we get nothing but shame.

Here are two more aspects of that web of images. In Greece, the main God who ruled over transgendered activities was Dionysus. His male followers would dress as women, his female followers would strap on large phalluses. He himself was depicted as a stick decorated with a dress and a beard. Some of the more patriarchal Greek writers described him as "effeminate" or "womanly." Indeed, his myth tells us that he was raised as a girl, and even when he came into his Godhood he often wore feminine clothes and kept his hair long and flowing, something only women were supposed to do.

The psychologist Ginette Paris tells us an interesting story about Dionysus. Raised as a girl, he went mad in adolescence. Paris tells us that we do not know the cause of his madness. Certainly some of the readers of this magazine might make a guess. Insane, Dionysus wanders the world until he comes to Phrygia, the home not only of Cybele and the Gallae, but according to some accounts, Aphrodite. Cybele initiates him, Paris tells us, and restores his sanity. Paris says we do not know how Cybele heals him. Did she initiate him back into his femaleness? Did she lead the God to embrace the doubleness of gender? After he returned from his wanderings, Dionysus became the God of ecstasy, leading men but especially women out of the traps laid for them by a rigid polarized society.

The second myth does not invoke transgendered or transsexual issues quite so directly. However, it involves someone clinging to a statue for deliverance from an emotional storm, and thus it returns us to the presence of Mary overlooking and blessing Dr. Biber's clinic. The Greek Orestes went mad -- madness again -- after Apollo ordered him to kill his mother as punishment for her crime of murdering her husband. Though the Goddess Athena absolved him he still had to pay a penance to the Goddess Artemis (Orestes's mother had killed her husband because he had sacrificed their daughter to Artemis in the hope of gaining the Goddess's favor -- the story of Orestes involves generations of murder and abuse). Thus Orestes wandered the world carrying a statue of Artemis. Finally, he felt the insanity leave him, and he dared to put it down. He set it in a riverbed and walked away. Two Spartans passed by. When they saw the statue staring at them, horribly, from the water, they went mad.

Now, Spartans were known for being ultra-masculine, while Orestes, despite his defense of his father, was considered -- like Dionysus -- effeminate. Thus, the rigidly male Spartans cannot believe the sudden emergence of the dark feminine. But there are more direct connections to our own stories. Artemis was often linked with Cybele. The most famous statue of Artemis stood not in Greece but in Ephesus, a town in Asia Minor, the home territory of Cybele. The Phrygians themselves described Artemis as another name for Cybele.

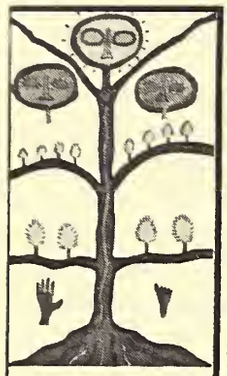
The Ephesus statue showed the Goddess's torso covered in small globes. Most modern writers assume these are extra breasts, showing her power as the Great Mother. Recently, however, a British archaeologist pointed out that the globes have no nipples. The archaeologist suggested they might have represented the testicles sacrificed by Artemis/Cybele's gallae worshippers.

Classical Greek Artemis was not a mother Goddess but a virgin. We might describe her as forming a link between transsexual women and lesbians (or between the two sides of a transsexual lesbian). Goddess of the Moon, Artemis lived in the mountains apart from the male dominated civilization. She refused all contact with men, spending her time with her band of nymphs. A lover, as well as hunter, of animals, she also watched over women in childbirth. In short, she is almost the model of a back to the land radical lesbian. And yet, as Cybele, she also is the Goddess who accepts the Gallae into her service.

And a final link -- the early Christian council which established Mary as officially the Mother of God took place in Ephesus, the site of that famous statue, once considered one of the seven wonders of the world. And so we come full circle, to Mary, and to Cybele/Artemis, and to statues.

Writing about the story of Orestes, the statue of Artemis, and the two Spartans, Roberto Calasso states "Such is the power of the image; it heals only those who know what it is. For all others, it is an illness." Transsexuality comes to us with all the power of a divine force who will not be denied. If we recognize it and accept it as a true vision of the self from the deepest part of the psyche, if we carry the Goddess with us until we find ourselves strong enough to set her self from the deepest part of the psyche, if we carry the Goddess with us until we find ourselves strong enough to set her down, then we may find it opens us to a life of spirituality and joy. If we try to deny it, or belittle it, or explain it away, it can destroy us. Knowing ignorance is strength. Ignoring knowledge is sickness.

If one is sick of sickness, then one is not sick.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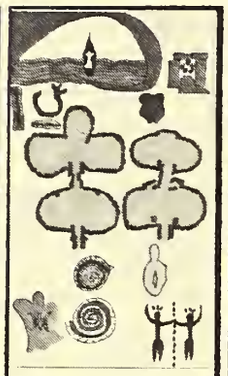

GIFT of STONES

PLACE of TREES

9 of TREES

DEATH
13

The MAGICIAN
1

7 of RIVERS

# A Tarot Reading in Honor of Davina Anne Gabriel

***by Rachel Pollack***

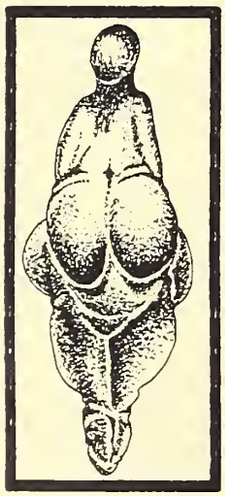
Over the past twenty-five years I have worked with Tarot cards in many different ways. Lately, I have begun to go beyond personal readings and ask the cards spiritual questions, such as "What is the soul?" or "What is magic?" Partly, these sorts of readings became possible when I created the Shining Woman Tarot, for Shining Woman is a deck rooted in the spirituality of the Earth and the human imagination. Its pictures derive from prehistoric and tribal traditions from six continents and fifty thousand years.

***"...transsexual desire and need come to us as spiritual gifts, opening up lives with ecstasy, and fear."***

On May 4, 1995, I decided to ask the cards "What is transsexuality?" It turned out they had a lot to say.

1. What is transsexuality? "The Speaker of Trees."

The Speaker cards all describe expressing ourselves in the world, communicating our knowledge and power. Trees is the suit of Fire, which means the basic energy of life, but also specifically sexuality. The card is joyous and creative. Like all the Speakers, it tells the truth, but in this case it tells a truth of the body.



2. How does it come to us? "The Gift of Stones."

This card literally refers to the gifts of the Stone Age Goddesses, whose names are lost forever, but whose power remains in the carvings, temples, and paintings uncovered by archaeology. The gifts of these oldest religious images include an understanding of the sources of religion in the creative power of the Earth. They also may include transsexuality, since there is great evidence that the crossing of gender, both socially and through altering the body, goes back to the Stone Age. The picture on this card shows an overhead view of a double temple on the island of Gozo, part of the country of Malta. Six thousand years ago, the prehistoric Maltese constructed their temples in the shape of women's bodies, with the chambers forming wide breasts and hips. Their statues, however, show realistic figures with feminine faces, soft rounded hips in flounced skirts (so that no genitals are visible) -- and completely flat chests. To me, this suggests sisters of the Gallae and the Hijras.

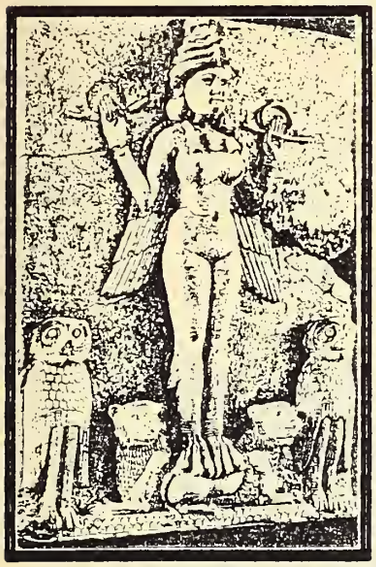
The card reminds us of transsexuality as a historical "gift" of the Stone Age Goddesses. More basically, it tells us that transsexual desire and need come to us as spiritual gifts, opening up our lives with ecstasy, and fear.

3. Where does it lead us? "The Place of Trees."

The picture, derived from a seal found on the island of Crete, shows a tree sanctuary of the Goddess, a place of abundance and joy, but also of peace and celebration. Transsexuality can lead us to such things when we overcome our hesitations and shame.

4. What does it radiate? "The Nine of Trees."

This is the most difficult card in the reading. The picture derives from a myth of the Sumerian Goddess Inanna, who woke



one morning to find her precious tree invaded by a bird, a snake, and the dark Goddess Lilith (whose name means "screech owl" and who later became a Jewish sexual demon). Suddenly powerless, the Queen of Heaven could only weep and beg for someone, anyone, to come help her. For many of us, this is exactly how transsexuality has "radiated" in our lives and our culture. The tree of our life becomes taken over by a power we experience as dark and alien. We want someone to help us, to "cure" us. This desire for a cure may continue even after we think we have come to terms with our transsexuality, even after we have gone through transition. Now we no longer want to "cure" transsexuality, but we still look for a cure for feelings of inadequacy. In the Speaker of Trees we saw the tree and the self (and the snake of power. Here the power of the self is hidden, and separated from sexual life energy) united and radiant with consciousness. The conscious being waits for deliverance and fears power. Here the power of the self is hidden, and separated from sexual life energy) united and radiant with consciousness. The conscious being waits for deliverance and fears its own sexuality, which it sees as a dark enemy.

5. What does it ask? "Death."

Oh yes. Nothing less. What else is transition but a dying? And if we do not trust in that death, and surrender to it, we can never really experience the full power of this incredible gift.

6. What does it give? "The Magician."

The card of power, of magic and art, of consciousness and creative action. Could anything be clearer than these last two cards?

7. What is its passion? "The Seven of Rivers." This is a card of journeys, but also of fantasies and dreams. The passion of transsexuality takes us into unknown and wondrous visions.

*Rachel Pollack is an nineteen years postoperative transsexual woman and the creator of the Shining Woman Tarot deck. She has written ten books on the subject of tarot and of four published science-fiction novels. Her third novel,* ***Unquenchable Fire****, won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in Britain for best science-fiction novel of 1988. She has written numerous articles on the subject of transsexuality which have been published in a variety of publications. She is a resident of Rhinebeck, New York.*

**Rachel Pollack**
photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

## S/he Who *(continued from page 21)*

women access to recording engineering skills?

It's amazing how the lesbians who complain that trannies act out stereotypical femininity still expect us to be ladylike. It fits perfectly with the new dyke gender stereotype of "gentle, angry people" that allows for wallowing in (self-) (righteous) anger while pretending to be above that sort of thing by virtue of having been born female. Unfortunately, "difference feminists" do not always confine their aggression to the passive variety. The reactions in *off our backs* to Davina Gabriel's letter about the first leafletting inside the Michigan Women's Music Festival ranged from patronizing to incredibly snide. Female Trouble, Philadelphia's club for S/M lesbians, published a study reporting one respondent in four had experienced physical violence at the hands of lesbians for being perceived (rightly or not) as a leatherdyke.

All of this corroborates Pratt's premise that even though feminism, especially lesbian feminism, is supposed to liberate us from gender appropriateness standards, there are still a lot of unspoken expectations in all parts of the lesbian community around what makes a proper woman, a proper lesbian, and even a proper butch or femme. I hope the door Pratt opened with *S/he* will make it possible finally to speak out on the gender hypocrisy that has sometimes made lesbian feminism more self-congratulatory than revolutionary.

And this brings me full circle to my "W" question of how good a book Pratt has put together for this undertaking. I realize I can only respond with a range: from very good but spotty to near-excellent. It occurred to me in critiquing my own reactions to this book that the segments I found to be somewhat weak may be passages that speak to and validate women more in the lesbian feminist mainstream -- women who have not had to carve out a life, identity and politics that assume an inability to rely on inclusion in lesbian feminism and the "women's community." By weaving her new theory into that framework, Pratt may be doing what it takes to promote receptivity to her ideas amidst that mainstream.

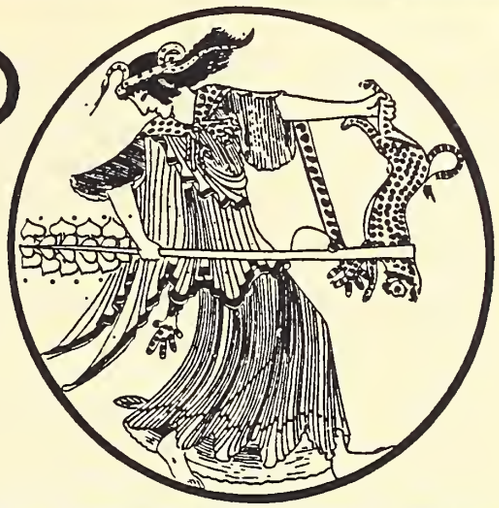
Can lesbian feminism catch up with the lesbian discourse, especially the sex-positive, genderflexing "queer" discourse, that has not stopped to wait for a place at the women's community table? Oh, Goddess, I certainly hope so. If not, it certainly won't be for lack of a superb effort by Minnie Bruce Pratt. With *S/he*, she strives mightily to broaden the lesbian feminist mainstream. Time will tell if it gets broadened enough -- and in time -- for its transsexual exiles to come back home.

*Mustang Sally is a twenty years postoperative transsexual lesbian and has been actively involved in the feminist and lesbian movements since the late 1960s. Her work has been widely published, and she is also a regular staff writer for* ***Transsexual News-Telegraph****.*

**Rachel Pollack**

photo by Maria Fernandez

# THE POWER AND THE PASSION: AN INTERVIEW WITH RACHEL POLLACK



***by Davina Anne Gabriel***

Rachel Pollack is one of the most prolific, imaginative and inspiring women in the transsexual community. Truly a pioneer in the realm of transsexual feminism, she has having been actively involved with the feminist and queer communities since the beginning of her transition in the early 1970s.

Born in Brooklyn, Rachel Pollack moved at the age of nine to Poughkeepsie, New York, the setting for her novel *Unquenchable Fire*. After living in Europe for nineteen years, Rachel recently returned to the U.S. to live in upstate New York.

> ***"I think that the way for us to have a healthy sense of our bodies is to see ourselves mirrored in a context that's not a medical context, in a context that has a more beautiful, deeper, profound aspect to it, and in this case, it's a religious context, or a sacred context."***

Rachel is one of several post-surgery transsexual women who are professional science fiction writers. Her fourth novel, *Temporary Agency*, was published in August of 1994. Her third novel, *Unquenchable Fire* won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in Britain, for best novel of 1988. Rachel has published ten books on the subject of Tarot, has created her own Tarot deck, the *Shining Woman Tarot* -- which was inspired by tribal and prehistoric art from around the world -- and has been called "the world's foremost authority on the Tarot."

Rachel is also the creator of the world's first transsexual lesbian comic book superhero, whom she created for the monthly comic book, *Doom Patrol*, a surreal superhero comic for Vertigo/DC. In addition to being a regular staff writer for *TransSisters*, She has also written numerous articles which have been published in a variety of publications including *Rites of Passage*, *The San Francisco Bay Times*, *Chrysalis Quarterly* and *Spring: a Journal of Archetypal Psychology*.

For the last several years, Rachel has intensively researched the spiritual history of transsexuality. In 1993, she gave a speech in France on "Aphrodite: Transsexual Goddess of Passion." In September of 1994 she led a "Shining Woman Tour of the Greek Mysteries," a journey to archaeological sites in Greece.

She was also actively involved in the formation of the Gender Identity Project at the Lesbian and Gay Community Center of New York City, where she organized a community celebration and commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of Christine Jorgensen's sex-change surgery.

The following interview with Rachel Pollack was conducted by telephone on Saturday; 3 June 1995:

**Davina**: When did you go through transition?

**Rachel**: I came out in 1971. I say "came out" because I didn't do the standard transition. I just jumped in and declared myself as who I was, and started doing it. That was in 1971 and I had surgery in '76.

**Davina**: What was it like transitioning at that time?

**Rachel**: It was very exciting. This was the time of gay liberation, and that provided me with my model of just being out there, nothing held back, being totally open. On the other hand, I would have to say that within the transsexual community, there was a kind of incomprehension about what I was doing. The whole attitude was entirely one of passing and of hiding who you are, and so my not making any effort whatsoever to pass was very confusing.

**Davina**: This was before you decided to have surgery?

**Rachel**: Right; surgery was not my goal. I suppose that if I had had all the information then that I have now that I would have thought of myself as a transgenderist, but I didn't have that expression.

**Davina**: You lived as a woman for several years before deciding to undergo surgery. If you felt that you didn't need it during the time you were living as a woman, what made you decide that you needed to undergo surgery?

**Rachel**: It was just feeling that I was ready for that change in my consciousness. It just seemed to me that who I was and the life I was living, that it was no longer appropriate -- and that's the only word I can think of -- to not have surgery. There certainly were societal issues as well. I was feeling like I didn't want to be such an outsider and so marginal anymore, but that's not meant as a characterization of people who don't have surgery. One of the things that persuaded me that I didn't want to be in that situation was one of the people I knew from a support group lived for about thirty years very successfully as a woman, and she got cancer, and the hospital put her in a men's ward; and she said that

she was ready to die as soon as possible because she was in that situation. I was very shaken by that. I was also disturbed by the fact that if I happened to get arrested for some reason or other, that I could go to a men's prison. So to some extent it was for reasons of safety, but I would have never done it just for those reasons.

**Davina**: You've said that your evaluation for surgery consisted of precisely one twenty minute session with a therapist. Were you given approval for surgery just on the basis of that one session?

**Rachel**: Well, to be fair, the therapist knew me. He was hosting a support group that I went to. He was also the person who approved surgery, and his attitude was that the issue was not how well I met any standards that he would set, but simply how well I knew what I was doing and how good my own judgement was. What he said to me was "Well, you know enough to know what you're getting into, and you obviously know yourself better than I can know you."

**Davina**: You didn't even have to take the usual battery of psychological tests?

**Rachel**: No; I only took physical tests. They did various types of tests to see whether there was any kind of intersexuality, but I don't remember taking any kind of psychological tests.

**Davina**: Is that typical in Holland?

**Rachel**: I would imagine that at that time it was not typical because most of the people who were candidates had not been living the life as long as I had, and did not present themselves as being as aware of what they were doing and okay about it. So I would imagine that they felt a need to screen people more tightly in general. But, again, the attitude in Holland has always been that it is not up to you to prove something to the doctors, it's up to you to know what you're doing.

**Davina**: What are some of the differences between transitioning in Europe and transitioning in the United States?

**Rachel**: It varies greatly from country to country. When I went to the Council of Europe -- which was about transsexuals and medicine and the law -- a couple of years ago, it was very clear that France, for instance, was a very difficult place; and in England it depended primarily on who your doctor was. Germany was very good and Holland was the most progressive. One interesting difference however is that there's not as much shopping around for surgeons as you have here because there often will be a government health insurance funded program, so you don't necessarily have as many options. There is not that informed consumer approach that you have in this country, but there are also fewer obstacles, and you can usually get it on your national insurance.

**Davina**: Are Europeans generally more tolerant towards transsexuality?

**Rachel**: There again, it varies by country. To be honest, I haven't personally encountered much intolerance here. At least not among the people I encounter, and I'm pretty out in my community. I had two transsexual friends in Amsterdam who were particularly tall, and they had very serious problems, including some physical battles on the street; but for the most part in Holland, and in Amsterdam particularly, there's a great deal of tolerance for people being different. In England, and in certain areas of London, it's very scary. I would say that the place that I felt most threatened was London.

**Davina**: You've stated that sometimes when you have brought up the subject of your own transsexuality that women friends of yours have said something to the effect of "Why do you want to bring that up? That's all in the past. You're a woman now, why do you want to remind people you were ever anything else?" So what do you tell them when they ask such questions?

**Rachel**: I say that it's just part of my life history. It's part of who I am, and I don't wish to have to make such separations or to have to suppress the feelings or the thoughts that come into my mind. I will also point out to them that if they're white and they have women friends who are black that they would not expect them to never mention being black, or other kinds of side issues to being a woman.

**Davina**: Did you identify as a lesbian during your transition?

**Rachel**: Yes.

**Davina**: Did you encounter any opposition from the medical profession because of your identification as a lesbian?

**Rachel**: Since I wasn't seeking anybody's approval, it didn't come up. In England you didn't need to go through any kind of psychological testing to get hormones, you just had to ask for them, and once I got to Holland, I was already on hormones, so I just continued. I really didn't have much of an encounter with the medical profession; but I know that in some places that certainly was a very big issue.

**Davina**: In your essay "Secrets," you recount another transsexual lesbian telling you that she thought that lesbianism is inevitable for transsexual women, and that you interpreted this to mean "that such an intense celebration of femaleness would open to sexual love in any woman who allowed herself the possibility." What is your opinion on this?

**Rachel**: I'm not sure I agree with her. In general, I don't think that people are quite as fluid in their sexual preferences as some people say. I think a lot more people have bisexual possibilities than allow themselves, but I also think there are some people who are clearly homosexual or clearly heterosexual, and really don't have much interest in the other, so I wouldn't quite agree with her. But I do agree to the extent that I think that a lot more women will find themselves moving in that direction simply because of the intensity and the focus on being a woman and on women's bodies and the celebration of it.

**Davina**: You've stated that in the early days of the gay & lesbian liberation movement that transsexual women who came out as lesbian were welcomed into that movement because "We seemed-- to ourselves as well as others -- to radically challenge society's assumptions about gender and inborn sexual identity." Was that your experience when you first became involved in this movement?

**Rachel**: Yes, absolutely. Particularly those first six months in England, people thought it was really cool. There were certainly people who were uneasy about it, but at the same time the general consensus was that this is just a wild and radical thing to do, and

that this really thumbed its nose at society's beliefs about inborn gender.

**Davina**: But isn't it also true that you were physically assaulted by a group of women at a women's conference because you refused to leave?

**Rachel**: No, that was a later time.

**Davina**: How much later was that?

**Rachel**: Well, it was a really strange thing. It was a very short changeover. I was in England for six months and I was very involved with lesbian feminists; and I had lots of good friends, or so it seemed. Then I left because my girlfriend decided that she wanted to come out to our families, so we wrote them letters and they called up completely hysterical, and we had to go home and talk to them. When we left there was a going away party for us by this group of radical women who had a commune; and they were crying and saying, "We're so sorry to see you go. Please come back." We went away, and three months later we came back, and the very first thing we did was to rush to see our good friends. There was one particularly good friend of ours whose name was Frankie. When we rang the bell, another woman answered the door and she stared at us and she said, "Frankie's not here. You can wait in there," and she pointed to a room in the back. We went into that room, and it was empty -- there was no furniture in it -- and we were kept there like we were penned until Frankie came and rescued us and took us out for coffee. What had happened was that the political ideology had shifted; and I've always been intensely grateful that I had been away for three months because I would have been tempted to think, "Well, I must have done something. It must be my fault. I must have acted badly." Instead, for me it was an overnight shift.

**Davina**: When did this shift occur?

**Rachel**: Some time during the first half of 1972.

**Davina**: When was it that you were attacked by that group of women?

**Rachel**: That was in the fall of '72.

**Davina**: What was the reaction by the rest of the women's community to that incident?

**Rachel**: Some women were sympathetic, but they didn't want to have to make any comments about it, and so were just sympathetic from a distance. At that point I wasn't really part of a wider kind of circle because there was so much hostility. One good friend of mine got very, very upset and she couldn't deal with it at all because she felt that she was being called on to choose between being friends with me and being in the women's community. Shortly after that happened, later that same day, I went to see her. I was obviously very upset, and I was bruised, and she just ran from the house; she couldn't deal with it.

**Davina**: What do you think caused that change in attitudes toward transsexuals at that time?

**Rachel**: My guess would be that there was simply a hardening of the social atmosphere. At the beginning of gay liberation there was such a tremendous sense of optimism, a sense of love. Everybody felt that this was the big change that they'd been waiting for all their lives. I've seen this happen in other kinds of movements. When that big change didn't occur, the frustration turned inward, and people started looking for scapegoats. The men started getting more chauvinist toward the women. The women started getting less patient with the male chauvinism. Then people started looking for other groups to attack. They find some minorities that are fairly helpless, and they make them the focus of hostility. This occurs, obviously, in the wider society. It's very clear that when there are economic hard times that's when minorities are in trouble, and it occurs in terms of smaller groups as well.

**Davina**: There has been a tremendous upsurge in interest in transsexuality and transgenderism within the last few years. To what do you attribute this?

**Rachel**: It's what I call critical mass. There's enough of us now, and that has two effects. One, it means that other people are taking more notice because a lot more people will encounter transsexuals. The other thing is that there are now enough people who can speak and write about it in such a way that other people will take notice and will think about it more deeply than they might have otherwise. Plus, talk shows have been tremendously important in getting people's minds focused on the subject.

**Davina**: Your novels *Unquenchable Fire* and *Temporary Agency* both take place in a future time following a spiritual revolution, but what struck me most about this time was that despite its acknowledgement and emphasis on spirituality, that it really wasn't all that different from contemporary America. There is still a great deal of things like corruption, deceit and jealousy in the world. That seems like a fairly pessimistic assessment of human nature. Am I interpreting you correctly here?

**Rachel**: Perhaps, but only if we equate spirituality with goodness. There's a passage in *Unquenchable Fire* in which a woman has a vision of the revolution before it happens, and she wants to make it happen so that it will end suffering, but she dies before the revolution comes. Then the Founders [of the Revolution] appear to her and say, "When we come, it will not be to end suffering. It will be for something else," and that something turns out to be ecstasy. So it's pessimistic in the sense that it's saying that suffering is a given: to be human is to suffer, but there's also the possibility of ecstatic transport through spirituality, through myth, through art, through stories.

**Davina**: In those two novels, there are characters called "bright beings." In *Temporary Agency* you describe a male and female pair of bright beings as possibly being a single entity "who appeared in two forms because of humanity's expectation of gender." (p.112) This would seem to suggest to me that you regard gender as something that does not exist on a spiritual plane, that it is just an illusion of the physical plane. Is this a correct interpretation?

**Rachel**: It's more of a case that gender is one of the privileges of being human. It's one of the things, that if there were pure spirit beings like angels, that this is one of the things they would lack.

**Davina**: Sexual expression and sexual ecstasy seem to be prominent themes in both *Unquenchable Fire* and *Temporary Agency*, but you seem to be presenting very contradictory messages about them. On the one hand, you portray them as

liberating, but you also portray them as something that is at least potentially all-consuming and destructive. In fact at one point in the novel you describe them as a "distorted vision of human liberation." Is this an accurate reading of what you're saying there?

**Rachel**: The idea expressed in that book -- and I'm not sure that it's actually my own idea, frankly; books often take on lives of their own -- is that sex that is done simply for the sake of sensation -- of seeing how far one can take pure sensation -- can be very destructive; but that sex is liberating when it is aligned to an expression of emotion. I'm not sure that I would agree with that personally, but that's the idea that emerges in the book.

**Davina**: There are several other professional science-fiction writers who are transsexuals. Why do you think that this is the case?

**Rachel**: I would guess that it has to do with being drawn to alternative realities because we're already living in an alternative reality, so it's not that hard to think of others, and to be excited by the possibility of others.

**Davina**: You're the creator of the world's first, and to my knowledge, only transsexual lesbian superhero, Kate Godwin (a.k.a. Coagula), whom you created for the comic book *Doom Patrol*. What gave you the idea of creating a transsexual lesbian superhero?

**Rachel**: I wanted to use the comic to explore transsexual issues, and I wanted to create a role model for transsexual people. It also just seemed logical because the previous version of the comic had a hermaphroditic character who was used to explore issues of transvestism and fetishistic crossdressing as well as of alchemy. In fact, Kate gets her powers from having sex with that character; and her powers to coagulate and dissolve are alchemical powers.

Rachel Pollack

**Davina**: What did D.C Comics think about the idea of having a transsexual lesbian superhero in one of its comics?

**Rachel**: They didn't really have that much of a reaction. Kate was a popular character among the people who were involved in the editorial part, but I didn't hear anything from the company about it one way or the other.

**Davina**: I've always had the impression that comic book writing is a very male dominated profession; so did you have any difficulty breaking into that profession?

**Rachel**: I didn't have to break into it in the normal way of having to submit my stuff blind and having to go through the system. I met the editor of *Doom Patrol* at a party and we got to talking, and he said that the current writer was leaving, and I said that that was a comic that I would be interested in writing. So he read some of my stories and called me up and said, "Why don't you do a sample script for us?" He liked my sample and hired me. I didn't exactly have to force my way through the male dominated system.

**Davina**: Kate obtains her power from a being who is both male and female. Are you making a commentary here about the need for transsexuals to acknowledge and integrate both their male and female aspects in order to achieve their full potential and greatest power?

**Rachel**: Actually, to be honest, no. It was just a plot device to be able to carry stuff over from the previous incarnation of the series, to have a cameo appearance of that character. What I was doing, though, was suggesting that there is that alchemical kind of process involved -- of the breaking down of an old identity and the creation of a new one. Where the issue that you're raising did come in was later when Kate and Cliff -- the robot man, who is very masculine in his manner and very rigid in his male identity -- have to merge, to become one person. I think that's where the issue of male and female identities making a whole person comes in, and also for Kate, as well as for Cliff, the issue of being willing to give up any rigidity to claims of who we are.

**Davina**: Did you encounter any resistance from D.C. to the transsexual and feminist content in your stories?

**Rachel**: Not from D.C. Comics, but I certainly encountered resistance from some readers, especially about the feminism. A lot of them felt that it was heavy handed. There was no outright hostility to the transsexual character. There was a kind of underlying feeling from some readers about the whole comic being weird just for the sake of weirdness. But many readers were very interested in the transsexual character.

**Davina**: So did D.C. Comics give you pretty much free rein to do whatever you wanted to do?

**Rachel**: Yes; they were very good that way actually, especially when it was having trouble with circulation. There was definitely the idea that we had to tighten it up and we had to make a better presentation, but there was never any suggestion that we should take a safer route.

**Davina**: Is Kate based on any real people you know, or based on any actual experiences by yourself or others?

**Rachel**: She was pretty much based on a conglomeration of people. Her profession of prostitute and her computer power were deliberately chosen from the main occupations of transsexual women. She was inspired by a number of people I know, including myself, but I pretty much felt that she was her own person.

**Davina**: The one criticism I have of Kate is that she is too idealized, that she is too indistinguishable from nontranssexual women, and that seems to me to be a standard of physical perfection that very few transsexual women are actually able to achieve. Why did you not make Kate somewhat more sexually ambiguous, the way that most transsexual women are?

**Rachel**: It wasn't up to me. I gave directions that she should be

more androgynous, and the first artist just ignored that. One of the problems that comics have, being so male dominated, is that there is a certain tendency to draw all women as male fantasies with big breasts and narrow waists and so forth. But I gave a description of Kate that was somewhat more androgynous: wider shoulders, narrow hips and so on, but he pretty much ignored that, and the second artist to a large extent did so as well.

**Davina**: How do you think that portrayal could have been improved?

**Rachel**: I don't necessarily think that she should have looked masculine. She still could have been idealized, but the ideal could have been one of a transsexual ideal, rather than a nontranssexual ideal.

**Davina**: The character Eliot, who appears in your four-part story "The Teiresias Wars" also seems like an idealized version of femaleness, but is actually supposed to represent a synthesis of male and female. Why didn't you portray Eliot as more ambiguous?

**Rachel**: Actually, I was very happy with the way that Eliot came out because Eliot is meant to be very idealized. Eliot, the Teiresias, is meant to be an angelic kind of being, a pure, perfect being. Perhaps you're saying that the figure was too feminine?

**Davina**: Yea, that's what I meant. She didn't have any masculine qualities.

**Rachel**: Oh, but she had a flat chest.

**Davina**: I guess that's something that I didn't even notice, since her skin is transparent. Eliot's name also has some significance to transsexuality, doesn't it?

**Rachel**: It's meant to be somewhat of a joke actually. It's based on the name T.S. Eliot. T.S. Eliot made Teiresias the hero of his poem "The Wasteland." Teiresias was a Greek mythological figure who changed sex, first from male to female, and then back from female to male. He was described in some places, particularly in Eliot's poem, as being androgynous. Eliot refers to Teiresias as an "old man with wrinkled dugs." And of course the joke is that T.S. is shorthand for transsexual.

**Davina**: In "The Path of Vanished Alphabets" in *Doom Patrol* # 78, which is the story in which Kate and Cliff merge into a single being, Kate says, "Orgasm takes place in the brain." I was surprised that Kate would say this because I know that it is something that you don't believe. So why did you have Kate say something that you don't believe yourself?

**Rachel**: I'm not sure that I don't believe it. There's some evidence that while there's the physical thing of engorgement with blood in the clitoris or the penis, and the spasming of the vagina, that the sensation of pleasure is fired in the synapses of the brain. If I remember it correctly, there's something about the synapses all lining up in rows, and that orgasm disrupts that, and that's what causes the sensation of pleasure. I think that's what I was referring to.

**Davina**: In the story "The Dogs of Soul" in Doom Patrol # 80, one of the other characters says, "My real self is a prisoner." This seems to me to support the concept of "being trapped in the wrong body." Was this your intention?

**Rachel**: The character who says that is a doll. In that particular story the idea was that that doll was just a psychic projection of someone who was being held prisoner somewhere. I don't think it was meant to apply to anyone's actual situation.

**Davina**: So that wasn't meant to have any relevance to transsexuality?

**Rachel**: No, it was just a plot device.

**Davina**: I think that I deliberately tended to look for things that related to transsexuality, and I may have interpreted things that seemed to imply something about transsexuality that weren't actually intended as such.

**Rachel**: With any work of art there are always meanings there that are not consciously intended, but they're still very real. They're very real on two levels. First of all, you perceive them, which is as valid as anybody else's perception, including mine; and since there's a transsexual person writing it, it's likely that those themes will come in in ways that are not conscious to me.

> ***"...the desire of transsexuality is not a desire that's in the mind and detached from the body. I feel that it almost goes down to the cellular level, and there's this need in the body to transform itself."***

**Davina**: Issue # 83 of *Doom Patrol* was a story that involved a character who had the power to implant false memories in the minds of others, and was titled "Remembrance of Lives Passed," which indicates to me that you're saying something here about passing. Was this intended as a commentary on the practice of creating "plausible histories" that all transsexuals seem to engage in to some degree at one time or another?

**Rachel**: That's an interesting interpretation, but what I was actually referring to was that we've already passed through those particular lives. But that would certainly be an interesting way to look at it. But my primary concern was actually just the whole idea of false memory that's being talked about a lot now, more than any particular concern with transsexuality.

**Davina**: Well, there again is another example of how it works on two different levels.

**Rachel**: Oh yea, I wouldn't say that interpretation is incorrect in any way.

**Davina**: One of the characters in *Doom Patrol* is a robot named Cliff in which a human consciousness has been implanted, and he obviously also has some identity issues. But what always struck me as odd about Cliff was that even though he is a robot, he is always wearing clothes, and I can't think of any other instance of a robot wearing clothes other than Cliff. So why was Cliff always wearing clothes? Was this intended as a way for him to express a gender identity?

**Rachel**: My interpretation of him is that he does so to pass. He's making a gesture at passing as human, even though later he says to Kate that he realizes that he really doesn't want to pass or he would have made more of an effort at it.

**Davina**: Another thing that I really liked about *Doom Patrol* was that Kate is actually the most normal person in the whole group, and in fact, Cliff remarks on this in one story. I know that

transsexuals generally grow up thinking that they are the strangest people on Earth, so were you trying to make the point that there are a lot stranger things than transsexuality and a lot less desirable conditions that one could find oneself in?

**Rachel**: I don't think I was making that point as much as I was making the point that being "normal" doesn't have anything to do with what makes you fit in; it has to do with how you live your life. If you live your life in the way of accepting who you are, and dealing with things as they come, and relating to people on a direct kind of level, then that makes you "normal."

**Davina**: *Doom Patrol* has ceased publication but been resurrected several times in its history. What are the chances of *Doom Patrol* being resurrected in the near future?

**Rachel**: It actually will be at some time, but it's more likely to be resurrected in a more conventional kind of form.

**Davina**: So you probably wouldn't write it again?

**Rachel**: I think that's highly unlikely. I have this fantasy that people will start looking back on it as this very great thing, and they'll ask me to come back, and Ted and I will get to do it again, but that's very unlikely.

**Davina**: Now that *Doom Patrol* has ceased publication, at least for now, do you think that you might use Kate in some other project?

**Rachel**: Unfortunately I probably can't because it was a D.C. owned property. Anything that is created for them becomes D.C owned, but I might explore bringing back a character who is more or less the same as Kate, but different enough that it doesn't create a copyright problem.

**Davina**: One of your critics blamed *Doom Patrol's* cancellation on your "obsession with feminine sexuality," and accused you of equating maleness with evil and stagnation and of equating femaleness with goodness, creation and beneficent change. How do you respond to that criticism?

**Rachel**: I don't think it's true. I think there were enough male characters who were presented as positive characters, and were also presented as sexual characters, for that not to be the case. I do think that I certainly explored more female issues than male issues, and one validity to that I think is that no one else is doing it, so why not do it? Most other comics writers are men. I felt that this was an opportunity to do something that wasn't being done.

**Davina**: Do you think that the feminist and transsexual themes and perspectives that you expressed in *Doom Patrol* contributed to its inability to survive in the comics market?

**Rachel**: I attribute it to a lack of empathy to feminism by a lot of the readers. Also, a lot of people just didn't like my approach; and that's certainly my fault.

**Davina**: You've studied rather extensively the history of transsexuality in other cultures going back into very ancient times, and you've stated that there is mythological evidence of transsexuality as part of consciousness in ancient times. The Gallae and the Hijra are two of the best known examples of ancient antecedents of transsexuality. What are some of the more obscure examples that you have run across in your research?

**Rachel**: My favorite is in ancient Israel, in Caanan. The evidence for this is in the form of a prohibition. In Deuteronomy, it says: "He who is wounded in the stones or has his privy member cut off shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord." If you know anything about the religious prohibitions in the Bible, you know that those prohibitions refer to things that were actually done in practice. There's evidence that that's indeed what it was. In the Torah, the commentary on that was: this means those who were unsexed in the service of some heathen cult. So to me that's an example of the fact that in ancient Israel, which borrowed from the previous culture of the Caananites, that that was the practice that was actually being done, and there are similar things. In North Africa, there's a Goddess -- something like Kumarbi -- who is connected to Aphrodite, but the description of her worship is of that same thing, that changeover from the male to female.

**Davina**: What relevance does that have for society as a whole and for transsexuals in particular today?

**Rachel**: I think that one of the biggest problems we face is the idea that this is a modern sickness, that this whole phenomenon of transsexuality is something that comes out of modern distortions of natural life, and that people living in a natural way don't have this situation. It's important to know that there's this history; that this is something that occurs throughout humanity all over the world. There's different kinds of transgender things in tribal societies, and there's actual surgery in some other societies, and so forth. Knowing this gives us a context in which to view our own lives with greater acceptance. Also, on a deeper level, I think I quoted in that article a statement by James Hillman, a psychologist, who said: "When the images change, the body changes." I think that the way for us to have a healthy sense of our bodies is to see ourselves mirrored in a context that's not a medical context, in a context that a more beautiful, deeper, profound aspect to it, and in this case, it's a religious context, or a sacred context.

**Davina**: You've said that you identify with the Maenads, the worshippers of Dionysus. How do they relate to transsexuality?

**Rachel**: Among the followers of Dionysus were men who would wear women's clothes, because Dionysus himself was raised as a girl according to the myth, and therefore wore women's clothes for a lot of his life. But there were also women who took on male identities -- who took on identities of wildness, of being unchained, of being free, of being beyond any kind of conventions; and in doing that they were perceived as male at the same time, but not in the sense that they did things that men usually did, but just to run free in the countryside and get drunk and have a great time, which is a lot of what they did. But it was deeper than that. Their very bodies took on male aspects. They were said to stand very tall and rigid, and they were literally described as standing like phalluses. In that sense, they were male, but it's not their identification with maleness that I felt a connection with, but simply their identification as wild women, and what I was thinking when I wrote that was: at what point post-transition do we stop, or at least get away from, identifying with those people who are perceived as men who take on women's identities, and do we start identifying with those people

who are perceived as women and live as women, but who break free of the confines of women's roles, and thereby to some extent, take on men's identities? People talk a lot about some Native American cultures in which one could change gender fairly freely, but it always strikes me when I read about those people that they would still have a hard time accommodating me. They appear to be like me in the sense of crossing over from male to female, but in the sense of what I would do, I'd be much more allied with those women who are crossing over from female to male. I'd be more interested in hunting than in sewing for instance.

**Davina**: I can certainly understand that because I've felt the same way about it. One of the terms you have used to describe yourself is *trance-sexual*. What exactly do you mean by that term?

**Rachel**: That's meant as a play on words. Trance is a spiritual state, a state of ecstasy; and through experiencing the power of transsexual experience, it takes us to a sense of intensity and beauty.

**Davina**: You wrote an essay called "Aphrodite: Transsexual Goddess of Passion." Most people would be very surprised, and might even consider it presumptuous, to describe Aphrodite as a "transsexual goddess." What exactly do you mean by describing Aphrodite as a transsexual goddess, and what significance does Aphrodite have for transsexual women?

**Rachel**: My basis for that is her story of creation. In that story, the male sky God Ouranos is oppressing Gaia, the Earth. So Gaia creates a sickle -- which is a women's harvest tool, and according to prehistoric archeological evidence was indeed created by women -- and says to her son Kronos basically, "Take care of your father." So Kronos cuts off Ouranos's genitals and throws them into the sea, and they stir up a foam from which Aphrodite arises. Aphrodite is the transformation of the male sky God. Her femaleness comes out of this maleness, and comes out of the removal of the male genitals. When you consider the fact that the people who did remove their male genitals did so with the same instrument -- with the stone sickle -- to me the implication is that Aphrodite is a much older Goddess than the standard version of her in Greek mythology, that she goes back to that shamanistic sex-change kind of practice that was done in the ancient pre-patriarchal Greek culture. What's left of that cult is, besides the Gallae, who came from Asia Minor, the story of Aphrodite, as well as various other stories that are very similar to it.

**Davina**: In the same essay you state that in order to achieve self-actualization that transsexual women "need to discover and embrace the Goddess within the all powerful desire of transsexuality." Can you elaborate on that?

**Rachel**: Transsexuality is extremely powerful and intense; it's something that overwhelms us. Most transsexual people want to be normal, and fight against their transsexuality, but transsexuality overwhelms them. It's stronger than their self-conscious egos. They say, "No, no. I don't want to do this," and yet they do it. So transsexuality itself is very, very powerful. Think about what we do in its name. We give up our lives, we give up our identities, our names. We run the risk at least of giving up our families, our friends, our jobs. We often move to a new place, take on a whole new identity. We face the strong possibility of public ridicule, of jail, of physical beatings, or even death in some cases. We take strong drugs, which can be very dangerous, to alter our bodies. Finally, we have surgery on our genitals. So you have to look at the question: What makes us do something like that? What is it that is so powerful that we will do all these frightening things? A lot of nontranssexual people have said to me, "I could never do what you did. I just couldn't face it." Most transsexual people would say, "Well, I don't really feel that I had a choice." Another thing that is interesting in relation to that are the people who are suppressing it, people who are living as men and have a strong sense of being women. They'll say something like "Barbara, or Joanna, or Joan will not be denied." They see their female selves as separate persons in them who are saying, "I will not let you suffocate me." So it's such a powerful thing, and we have the choice of how we look at what that is. The model that we're given is that it is a sickness. We're given the sense that this is something that is a distortion of our natural being; that it's a genetic sickness, or it's a social conditioning sickness, or that it comes from our parents, or that it comes from society's rigid gender roles, but whatever it is, it's a sickness, and we're made to think that it's very destructive, that it's a way of self-hate,a way of feeling inadequate, a way of feeling inferior to every other person, a way of feeling shame. Another way to look at it is to say that transsexuality is simply part of the human spectrum, which is a lot more healthful for us, but at the same time, I'm not sure that it really matches that power. It's almost a kind of practical step, to see in all these societies throughout history that it was seen as something sacred, as something wondrous and emotional because it is sacred.

**Davina**: You also say that "[Aphrodite] teaches us, transsexuals especially, that we cannot understand and unleash the power of desire without our own surrender." What exactly do you mean by that?

**Rachel**: I was very inspired by a statement by a writer named Nor Hall, and that is: "Abandonment to the body's desire is itself a source of revelation." This is something that I have to remind myself over and over again because it's something that's not acceptable, the idea of surrendering to desire. In our society we want to be in control of everything. We're always being told: "Get control of your life." There are workshops and even ads in the newspaper giving us some kind of technique that will give us control of our lives, and that's because we're a very ego driven kind of society. It's the model that, as a feminist, I would equate with the patriarchal model -- the heroic ego that is in charge of everything. But transsexuality is something that takes us beyond that. It's something we surrender to and then we make discoveries that are beautiful and overwhelming and frightening and meaningful. We make discoveries about ourselves and what we want and about who we believe ourselves to be and about our relationships with other people.

**Davina**: Another one of the Greek Goddesses you've written about as having particular significance for transsexual women is Persephone. Could you explain what is the particular significance of Persephone for transsexual women?

**Rachel**: Persephone is an innocent girl who, in the first part of

the story, has no name; she's simply called the Kore, which means daughter. She is kidnapped by Hades, the God of Death, and taken to the underworld. Eventually, she returns back to consciousness by the efforts of her mother, Demeter, who stops all things from growing on the Earth until the Gods give Persephone back. But what's interesting about Kore is that it is through the underworld that she becomes conscious, and that she becomes Persephone, one of the meanings of which is "She who shines in the dark." So she gains consciousness, she gains awareness of her self and her individuality by shining in the dark and by facing up to the experience. Persephone also means "the pupil of the eye." Persephone remains conscious in the underworld, she refuses to surrender her consciousness. She goes into death with her eyes open. The relevance of this to transsexuals is that transsexuality is a kind of death and rebirth; one aspect of yourself dying and another aspect of yourself coming into being. Persephone on one level is simply the Goddess who goes down into death and comes back up again. She's therefore the Goddess of anybody who goes through a life changing experience, but on a deeper level, she's also the Goddess of anyone who goes after that experience, which can be quite terrifying, that loss of identity through transsexuality, or through other things as well. She goes into it and she says to us, "Don't close your eyes to this. Pay attention. Learn from this experience and find your power in it." In another article about Persephone, I ask the question: What is it that gives Persephone her power? The power that she gets is that she becomes Queen of the Dead; and she replaces the God of Death as the most important person in the underworld. She becomes Queen of the Dead -- in what you might call feminist consciousness -- in the sense that she gives new life to people. Previously they went down into death, and Hades said, "Okay, I'm in charge now. You'll never get out." But Persephone's promise is that, "Yes, you die, but I give you a new way of being. I give you a new beauty." She replaces that old harsh tyrannical way with this new life-giving way. I think that's a very apt image for those of us who do wish to find the life-giving quality of transsexuality. I think the Persephone kind of quality is to say, "Okay, I'm in this situation. I'm in this life-changing transition, and I'm going to embrace it as much as I can."

**Rachel Pollack**
photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

**Davina**: In your essay "An Ordinary Miracle" you say that transsexual women need to find ways to acknowledge, explore and to celebrate those things that make us unique among women while at the same time claiming our place among women. What are some of the ways that we can accomplish that?

**Rachel**: I suppose that goes back to that question you asked about what do I say when people say to me "Why do you want to talk about this? Why don't you just be who you are now?" I don't think there's a specific program for it, but I think it has to do with being open -- speaking openly for instance -- and it has to do with sharing the things with other women that you can share, and recognizing the ways in which our lives are like those of nontranssexual women, and at the same time exploring the things that are special to being transsexual.

**Davina**: You've said that "It is my belief and experience that we do not heal from shame simply by telling ourselves that we're fine, and we have nothing to be ashamed of. The very passion that gives our lives meaning can be the reason why shame grips us so powerfully." If "the very passion that gives our lives meaning can be the reason why shame grips up so powerfully," how then do we overcome that shame?

**Rachel**: That's why it's so important to go into the passion and to embrace it. A lot of us try to justify and rationalize being transsexual. We say, "Well, I wanted to play with girls when I was a child," or "Women are nicer than men," and various kinds of things that we say to indicate that this was a sensible life choice, rather than something that was driven by a passionate desire. But if we really accept just how powerful the passion is, then we will stop being quite so ashamed of having given into it. I think there is a lot of this feeling of, "It's humiliating." Our society teaches us that it's a humiliation for someone who is a man to take on the identity of a woman. But I think that part of why we accept that it's humiliating and shameful is because we experience it as such a powerful desire that we couldn't fight against.

**Davina**: You've said that "there is a wider teaching from the transsexual experience, one that involves the absolute commitment we all need to make to become who we really are -- and the power, spiritual as well as emotional, that comes to us when we make that commitment and follow it through." What exactly is that wider teaching that you are referring to?

**Rachel**: The experience is so focused; we really know just exactly what it is that we want. We get to do what we want, and most people don't get to do what they really want to in life. There are lots of people who have a sense that there are things they want in life -- aspects of themselves that they don't reveal, that they're frightened of other people finding out, or that have been painful to them in some way, or things they want very passionately, but don't know how to achieve. I think that the transsexual person's commitment to really letting nothing stand in our way to get what we need is something that lots of people could benefit from.

**Davina**: Could you elaborate on what you meant by the statement "Transsexuality is a movement of passion and ecstasy. The body is its vehicle rather than it destination?"

**Rachel**: My feeling is that it's not a question for me of starting off with a desired end result of how my body should look, and to do what I can to get there and to say, "Okay, now I've arrived." The whole range of the experience of transsexuality is in and of itself a kind of ecstatic journey, and the transformation that I do with my body through hormones and surgery and various other techniques are part of that journey, are part of that ecstasy. I can

remember very clearly certain moments of joy and excitement at what I was doing, and those were at very early stages of transition. Now I know that there are certain people who can only be satisfied with looking a certain way and having an end result, and they just don't want anything else. But my frame of mind was very much to be thrilled by just doing it. I had wanted to do it all my life, and I'd been afraid and ashamed to, but I finally didn't care whether it looked exactly right or not.

**Davina**: Do you think that sexual identity -- either transsexual or nontranssexual -- is inborn?

**Rachel**: I don't know; it seems to happen pretty early. I remember somebody asking me when I gave a speech about Aphrodite a couple of years ago about parental influence or some influence early in life, and asked what I thought of that, and I said, "When people start asking about heterosexuality -- when they start investigating what it is that causes people to turn out to be heterosexual non-gender dysphoric, or whatever you want to call the majority state of being -- then I will worry about what causes transsexuality." To my mind I feel that it is somewhat of a trap that we fall into to be looking at how we got this way. I know a lot of transsexuals will be excessively concerned with this, and I know that I have been in the past. Or if I didn't, I would be of a very firm attitude of "I am what I am and it doesn't matter." Then as soon as I encountered some famous expert like Robert Stoller coming up with some theory I would be sent for a loop. I would be disturbed for days. I hadn't yet dealt with that issue of being afraid that there actually was some secret cause of my transsexuality. I decided some years ago to look at and to deal with that fear that it was some kind of early conditioning and therefore wasn't natural, that that kind of Janice Raymond point of view was really true, and that I was simply a sort of distorted, castrated man. I looked at it through therapy, and support groups, and journal writing, and finally decided it really was an empty fear.

> ***"...transsexuality is something that...we surrender to and then we make discoveries that are beautiful and overwhelming and frightening and intense and meaningful."***

**Davina**: You're one of the founding members of the Rite of Passage Conference, which is a conference specifically for postoperative transsexual women. What led you to decide to create a conference for postoperative transsexual women?

**Rachel**: I'm a founding member in the sense that I was there for the first event, and all of us took it over, and we made it our event, but we didn't really create it ourselves. What happened was that an organization called the Outreach Institute decided that there were no services provided for people after surgery, that there were a lot of support groups, psychological counseling, and other kinds of services for people up to surgery, but someone after surgery was basically thrown into the world and assumed to be able to take care of themselves, and there were no structures for them. This is one of the interesting things about its history. It's been criticized for being called the New Woman Conference, which is what it was called up until this year. One reason that it was called that was that it was originally conceived as something for people who had just had surgery. They set up a conference and they hired a couple of experts, who were happily transsexual women themselves, to give lectures. But who showed up at the conference, to everybody's amazement, was a whole range of people. There were some people who had just had surgery, but there were also quite a few who had had surgery some years earlier, and we came because we wanted the experience of being with other people who had gone through this. So what happened was the discovery of power. What everyone kept coming to was what an overwhelming energy there was in that space. It has an intense effect upon people who go to it, which in some ways, is also very disturbing. It deals with some of the stuff that we don't want to have to deal with, but the support that comes from it is very powerful because post-surgery women are very isolated. Either we say, "Okay, I'm going to put this behind me; I'm going into the woodwork." Or if we wish to stay involved, so many other people go into the woodwork that we become isolated ourselves. There's also intense pressure on post-surgery women to say that everything is wonderful. The question that people always want to ask when they get to seriously talking to someone who has had surgery is "Do you regret doing it?" There's intense pressure to be happy. But you can only really be happy if you're willing to look at what makes you unhappy too. I don't want to give the impression that Rite of Passage is about people exploring their unhappiness, but subjects that are painful do come up. But on the whole, the experience is one of very great bonding, a great sense of women feeling that they're not alone, of women feeling that their life experiences are matched by others, and a very powerful feeling of spirituality.

**Davina**: Were you surprised at the amount of opposition that was expressed by some segments of the transsexual community to the idea of a conference for postop women only?

**Rachel**: Yes, I suppose so. I think it's a shame because I believe that it's a kind of misplaced anger.

**Davina**: To what do you attribute the widespread misperception about the nature of that conference among its opponents?

**Rachel**: To some extent, it is the unfortunate structure that does put surgery as a kind of pinnacle. I think there's a natural feeling of people who either have not had surgery or don't want to have surgery that the post-surgery people are putting themselves forward as superior, especially if we're going to have a conference that's just about that, but I don't believe that that is what the conference is for, and I don't believe that anyone ever claimed that it was for that.

**Davina**: In your essay "Transsexual Rights and Others," you say that you have a problem with the word *transsexual* because it was coined by a doctor to describe what he thought of as a pathology, and that if you reject the description of yourself as a pathology rather than as a person that maybe you should reject the word *transsexual* as well. Is this still your feeling?

**Rachel**: Yes, but I haven't found any good alternatives, because

people do have some idea of what you're talking about if you say *transsexual*, but I think that most people's interpretation of that word would not be mine particularly.

**Davina**: What would you say to someone like myself who would say that that it is not the term *transsexual* itself that is inaccurate, but only the interpretation of that word as a pathology that is incorrect and that rather than replace the word, we just need to de-stigmatize it?

**Rachel**: I think that's a more practical approach because everyone accepts the word, but I think it's interesting that heterosexual male crossdressers achieved a much greater acceptance in our society when they started calling themselves *crossdressers* rather than *transvestites*. The word *transvestite*, being Latinate, has a medical quality to it. It's something that a psychiatrist will explain as a medical pathology. Whereas *crossdresser*, which is simply an English translation of *transvestite*, is a name that these people have taken for themselves. They chose that name for two reasons, I understand. One was to distinguish themselves from gay men who dressed in drag, and the other was to have it be something that sounded more normal. The important thing for me is that the term *transsexual* is an adjective and not a noun; I am not a transsexual, I'm a transsexual woman. There's a big difference between those statements.

**Davina**: You've been fairly critical of the medical professionals who provide services to transsexuals. Do you see this situation as improving? Are medical professionals becoming more sensitive to the needs and concerns of transsexuals?

**Rachel**: I certainly see it as improving in the sense that there are some people who are asking the right questions and are attempting to respect the people whom they provide service to. I certainly feel that there are plenty of people who are continuing to wield the kind of power over the people they're working with and to see these people as pathological and who deny these people the reality of their experience. This is most evident with the psychologists who treat children. Children's programs are often very frightening. They're programs to teach people self-hate.

**Davina**: In your article "Infinite Length: Impressions of the XIII International Symposium of the Harry Benjamin Association," you describe most of the doctors at that conference as feeling that orgasmic ability among transsexual women is an anomaly. Yet most surgeons report that the vast majority of their patients are orgasmic postsurgically. Doesn't this tend to indicate that these doctors are deliberately lying about the frequency with which their patients are able to experience orgasm?

**Rachel**: The thing about orgasm being an anomaly was a hint. It was in a particular exchange, a reference to someone saying how one of his clients had written to him that after surgery that she had multiple orgasms. Now he sort of laughed at this and said, "Well, *we* would certainly not have thought this was possible." But it was clear that he didn't mean the multiple part; he meant the orgasm part. Now what he seemed to think was not possible was to have a clitoral, vaginal, pulsating physical response orgasm. It hinted to me that they didn't expect that this could be the case. So I have to ask the question, "What do they mean when they say orgasmic satisfaction?" It seems to be possible that what they meant by orgasm was a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, which to a large extent they equate with being penetrated by a man. But I might be totally wrong. Maybe they really do mean orgasm, and this one person was simply not attuned to that. Actually, there are two reasons for feeling disturbed about that discussion. One reason is that what they talked about in their presentations was appearance and depth. When orgasm or clitoral response was mentioned it was always very peripherally. I remember one very prominent surgeon saying, "Now what the male-to-female client desires, *of course*, is good cosmetic appearance and good depth." Period. He didn't even mention response, even as a third category, even as a distant runner-up. The other reason that it was so disturbing was that at the New Woman Conference, many of the women who reported that they didn't have orgasms went to one of those doctors who claim that the vast majority of his patients have orgasms. There's some lack of communication here. It might very well be that the transsexual women are simply ashamed to admit that they're not having orgasms. It might be a kind of not entirely conscious collusion, in which orgasm just might mean this general satisfaction. Again, I don't want to imply that there's something wrong with people who don't have orgasms or that that's the only point of surgery. I think that if someone goes to surgery and the doctor says, "Well, there appears to be a trade-off, either you can keep a good deal of erectile tissue and have orgasms, which will possibly block the vagina somewhat or you can go for maximum penetration and run the risk of giving up orgasmic response." If what somebody says is "What really matters to me is being able to have intercourse with my partners, I'll go in that direction," I think that's absolutely a fine thing to do. What I find disturbing is when someone says to the doctor, "Will I be able to have orgasm?" and the doctor says, "Oh, yes! Ninety percent of my patients have orgasm. Don't worry about it," and then after surgery the women find that they're not feeling anything.

**Davina**: Were you surprised by the results of the survey at NWC that indicated that only about a quarter of postop transsexual women are orgasmic?

**Rachel**: No, I really wasn't that surprised because a number of my postop friends had that problem, and I was already disturbed by that. I didn't have that many friends whom I was close enough to to talk about whether or not they were orgasmic, but with the ones that I did talk about it, it was definitely the majority who were having trouble.

**Davina**: What is your opinion of the HBIGDA Standards of Care?

**Rachel**: I think that to the extent that people's lives are controlled by the doctors, that's really a problem. To the extent that people are given opportunities to know what they have to know and to make their own choices, I think it's good, and I'm glad that there's a movement to shape it more in that direction. I know that there's less of a tendency now than there used to be for someone to have to prove that they pass totally successfully to get surgery. I don't think that that should be the doctor's decision. I do feel that people should be at least encouraged very

strongly to not have surgery until they've gone through a period of time -- for most people, probably a year, I suppose -- of living full-time in the life they're going to be living. That's not so they can prove that they can do it to anybody's satisfaction, but just so they themselves will know what it's like, so they'll know what the experience is, as much as can be known before surgery.

**Davina**: So I take it that you wouldn't agree with the transsexuals who are saying that there shouldn't be any standards of care; that they should just be eliminated.

**Rachel**: I think that there should be standards of care to give doctors something to turn to for advice. I don't think that there should be standards in the sense of rules that it has to be this way or else, "Sorry, but you're not going to get it." I talked with Anne Ogborn once about this, and I felt she made a strong argument for surgery on demand. She said, "What evidence is there that denying surgery to people who want it is going to make their lives any better?" I thought that was a pretty strong argument.

**Davina**: In your article "The NWC and Its Critics" you stated that "genital surgery . . . involves cutting and reshaping the very base of our sexuality. It is profound and meaningful in very subtle ways," and in another essay you state: "the surgical transformation of human genitals strikes me as profound, beautiful and frightening." Could you elaborate on the ways in which genital surgery is "profound, beautiful and frightening?"

**Rachel**: The easy one is the frightening because any surgery is frightening. Almost the first thing people will say to me is "You must have so much courage," because it's very scary to have surgery, and when you think about the fact that it's surgery on your genitals, I think that's very frightening thing to do. There's the practical aspect of it, the possibility that it might not work. You might end up feeling asexual. But it's also frightening psychically because it's cutting into the place of your sexual energy. The way in which it's beautiful is in the way in which any transformation is beautiful. Any kind of change that liberates, that opens up a new life possibility has beauty to it, and hopefully, of course, it's aesthetically beautiful as well, but mainly, I meant beautiful in the psychological sense, in the sense of giving new life and new possibilities that hadn't been opened up before. I think that it's profound because it does mean that you're life changes profoundly. I don't agree with those persons who say, "Well, surgery is just cosmetic and you're just the same person as you were before." I understand why they say that. They're saying that to people who think that as soon as they have surgery then they're going to get a great job and everyone will love them. So they have to be told, "No, surgery is not going to change the circumstances of your life." But I don't think it's just snip, snip and you're the same person.

**Davina**: Yea, I don't either. I think it's the most profound change that a person can experience.

**Rachel**: That area in particular -- the way in which it is profound -- has been unexplored, and I think it's unexplored because there has been this pressure to say, "Well, don't put too much weight onto it." It's important to discourage people from thinking that it's going to solve all of their problems, but the sad side effect of that is that it doesn't get explored. That's why I think the Rite of Passage is so important, because it's one of the few places where post-surgery people are given the opportunity to look at it honestly and joyously.

**Davina**: There is now a tendency within the trans community to trivialize sex-change surgery, to regard it as no different than a nose job or having a mole removed, to say that it is merely cosmetic, or to say that it is unnecessary. To what do you attribute this tendency to trivialize the significance of surgery?

**Rachel**: First of all, there's that sense that we have to make sure that people don't put too much emphasis on it in the wrong way. So we overcompensate for that. Also, there's that fact that it's "frightening and profound," and one way to deal with that is to say, "Oh, it's not that important. It's something that I want to do, and I can't wait to do it, but really, it's not that big a deal." That's a way to not look at just how big a deal it is emotionally and psychically.

**Davina**: So how would you respond to someone who says that this is just cosmetic, that it's just like removing a mole or something like that?

**Rachel**: First, I would try to realize that maybe for them that's exactly what it is. I might, if I had the opportunity to go into it with them, talk about some of the issues about it that seem significant to me, and talk about some of the different ways in which people are taught to experience it. For instance, for those people who have grown up hating their genitals, it is much more than a mole because there's the intensity of emotion involved in getting rid of it. The emotion is just pure, liberating joy to finally be rid of that. Then there are those people who don't hate their genitals, but simply want to have surgery for its own sake,

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and that will be a different kind of experience.

**Davina**: In your article "The NWC and Its Critics," you say that you have never met anyone who believed that surgery would solve all of their problems. But haven't you at least met persons who had vastly unrealistic expectations about what surgery would accomplish?

**Rachel**: I'm not sure that I have, but since I hear this from you, and from Dallas Denny, and from Anne Ogborn, and from a lot of people I respect, there must clearly be people who feel that way. But when I used to go to a support group in New York, which was mixed -- people of all levels: pre-transition, in transition, and post-transition -- what I would actually hear from people was: "I know this is not going to solve all my problems. I know I'm going to have to make my own life afterwards." At least that's what people would say. Maybe they just knew that it's politically correct to say that.

**Davina**: If you did know someone who had vastly unrealistic expectations about what surgery would accomplish, don't you think that it is rather dangerous to advise that person to "surrender totally to a desire they cannot understand?"

**Rachel**: No, because what I mean by that is to explore what that desire is, and to try to find out just what it is that they're desiring, and what it means to have that desire. I'm saying that people should become more conscious rather than less conscious.

**Davina**: So would you agree that this surrender needs to be tempered with reason and very careful evaluation?

**Rachel Pollack (r.) and her partner Fara Shaw Kelsey**
photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

**Rachel**: I think it needs to be tempered with a great deal of self-knowledge. If I met a person who would say to me, "I've just got to get surgery. That's all I have to do and everything will be fine," I would say to that person, "Well, maybe you should look at what it is you want. What is it that you're really after in life? Is it just surgery? Surgery is a physical act. Who do you want to perceive yourself as being? What kind of life do you wish to have? And then you can see where surgery fits into that kind of life, and the person you believe yourself to be." That's what I meant about it being frightening. It's scary to look that closely at yourself.

**Davina**: Don't you think that there are individuals who desire to have surgery who will not benefit from having it, and may even be made worse off as a result of doing so?

**Rachel**: My first reaction is that it's not really up to me to judge that. If I were a surgeon I would have that concern. I think it's a legitimate concern of the surgeon to feel that what one is doing for somebody is a benefit, but I'm not sure that as somebody who is not either the person who is seeking surgery or the surgeon, that it is actually my business. I guess that if such a person came to me for counseling, then it would be my business because they would be asking my opinion.

**Davina**: Well, how would you deal with someone whom you thought would not benefit from having surgery?

**Rachel**: First, I would have to look at the questions of "Why do I think that?" and, "In what way do I think that that person would not benefit," and look at what my value system is. If I still thought that my value system is correct, and I really thought that that person would suffer, then I would talk about it with the person. But I don't think it would be up to me as a counsellor to be in a position to forbid this person to do that.

**Davina**: But there are undeniably individuals who have gone through surgery who have regretted it, so it does seem to me that there at least needs to be some careful evaluation of people and what their motives are and what they want to get out of this. Would you agree with that?

**Rachel**: I think that people need to be encouraged to do that kind of thing for themselves.

**Davina**: So then, do you think that there any valid reasons for denying surgery to someone who wants it?

**Rachel**: Yea, sure. I think the first valid reason would be if a person is clearly not in touch with reality. I'll give you an example. I was listening to a radio talk show late one night. Somebody called up and said to the psychologist, "I want you to tell me if I should be a man or a woman." So, as you can imagine, she was somewhat taken aback by this question, and very sensibly she made no attempt to answer it. She said instead, "Well, what makes you think you should be a woman?" And she suggested getting in touch with support groups, with transsexual people both who are going through transition and who have gone through surgery, and basically just finding out more information. The person said, "Well, okay, I'll do that." But then he said, "Oh, and I have another question. What do I do about the people who come to my room every night and tie me up and kidnap me and beat me?" And she said, "What?" And he said, "Yea, the priest told them to do it." Now, it's certainly possible that this is actually happening, but you have to make the judgement that this person is probably quite out of touch with reality. That's a case -- if I were the surgeon -- in which I would say, "Look, I can't go along with this, I can't in all conscience give you the surgery you're asking for. I think you should get some counseling, and we should look at it together -- you, me and the counselor."

**Davina**: Do you think that there are any other valid reasons other than being totally out of touch with reality for denying surgery to someone?

**Rachel**: The reason that is often given is that a person simply can not pass, and therefore will have a miserable life, and I think that's certainly an issue that needs to be addressed, but I think that if you can determine that the person understands that and is willing to pay that price and accept that, then I would tend to say, okay, that's the person's life and if that's the way she wants to live her life, and if it's important to her to have surgery, I would tend to go along with her.

**Davina**: But what about somebody who obviously is not going

to pass, and for whom there is also good reason to believe will not be able to cope with the stigmatization of not passing either?

**Rachel**: I think the primary thing would be to try to help that person understand that possibility. I think that I might want to delay the surgery if I felt that that was going on, and the person did not understand that that was going to happen.

**Davina**: I've known people who did not pass at all, and who obviously would never be able to pass either, but for some reason believed that surgery was going to make them pass. What would you think about somebody like that?

**Rachel**: I would certainly try to point out to them that surgery is not going to affect their outer appearance. I might try to help them look at ways to make them pass better if that's important to them.

**Davina**: I would think that it would be very dangerous to provide surgery to someone like that because obviously once they have it and find out that it's not going to do what they expect it to do and their lives are not going to be what they expected, they'd be high risks for suicide.

**Rachel**: Well, what about the question that Anne Ogborn asked?

**Davina**: There's another side to that too. I think she's asking the wrong question; she's deliberately framing the question in a way to support her position. The relevant question is not "How do you know that not providing surgery will make someone better?" but "How do you know that providing surgery will not make someone worse off than before?" Since there is incontrovertible evidence that providing surgery to some people will make their lives worse, that's the question that it becomes imperative to ask. So that's what I would say to Anne.

**Rachel**: I'm not entirely sure of that. I don't have any evidence one way or the other. I think that possibly, to some extent, there's a certain bias to assume that -- that if somebody's unhappy after surgery, then it's surgery that has made their lives worse.

**Davina**: Oh, but there undeniably are people who very clearly regret very deeply having surgery, and some of them have gone on television talk shows and have talked about how they think doing this was a terrible mistake and how miserable they are because of it. So there very clearly are people like that. So, personally, if I were a surgeon and someone came to me with very obviously unrealistic expectations about what surgery would accomplish, who for instance thought that surgery was going to magically transform her into some gorgeous fashion model -- and I have known at least one person who believed exactly that -- I think that would be a very valid reason for denying surgery to somebody.

**Rachel**: That's obviously an example of someone being totally out of touch with reality too. Surgery is not going to change everything about you. What it can do for some people, however, is make them feel more rooted in their identities, so that they will pass better, if passing is what they want, and they will just be more successful being able to live their lives because they feel less marginalized. So they won't wear so much makeup, for instance, or they won't have such exaggerated gestures; they won't always feel the need to be proving something. Or conversely, for someone who had very masculine features, they just might accept that more. I know that there is also a risk that they'll accept it less, that they'll think, "Well, now I have a female body and I have female genitals, and I shouldn't have to have these problems anymore." But there also might be some people who would say, "Well, it just doesn't matter to me anymore."

**Davina**: Right. The problem is sorting those people out.

**Rachel**: Yea, exactly.

**Davina**: You once told me that something that you have observed is that even persons who continually discount the importance of passing always seem to want to make it very clear to others that they have no trouble passing themselves. Where do you think this comes from, is it something that is imposed upon us or is it something that is intrinsic to transsexuality?

**Rachel**: I think it comes from the powerful hold that passing has on us, and that comes from what Kate Bornstein and Martine Rothblatt call the bi-polar gender system, which is to say our cultural conditioning -- that we either have to be men or we have to be women, and we have to be successful at that. It certainly comes from nontranssexual people being the model for transsexual people because nontranssexual people are the majority, so we have to look like them as much as possible to feel okay about ourselves. We have to look "real." I also feel that it comes from that feeling of shame, that if being a transsexual woman or man is not real, then we have to approximate as much as possible what is "real." How much of that comes from conditioning; how much of that comes from an inner feeling of unreality or some other kind of inner thing, I'm not exactly sure. An awful lot of it definitely comes from conditioning. One of the conditionings that we get is not just the conditioning in the outer society, but also specifically from other transsexual people to whom passing is everything, and who feel that if you don't pass that you're just not good enough.

> ***"...we need to raise transsexual consciousness, but to do it in a feminist way, which is an equality of sharing and a respect for each person's life history."***

**Davina**: In your essay "Transsexual Rights and Others," it seems to me that what you are saying is that anyone who identifies as a woman has an intrinsic right to be in any space that is designated as women-only space regardless of the feelings of the majority of the other women there. Is that a correct interpretation of what you are saying?

**Rachel**: I'm not really sure myself; I think I dodged that issue a bit. That's a very tough one -- is there some point at which you can draw a line? Is it surgery? That's very arbitrary. What about those women who live full time and who often -- in the conventional way of thinking -- pass much better than someone who has had surgery? If they didn't take their pants off, no one would ever know. So it's kind of absurd to make that kind of distinction.

**Davina**: But shouldn't each individual group of women have the right to draw the line where they see fit?

**Rachel**: I remember you and I talked about this once, and I was very impressed with your arguments -- that you feel if it

represents the feelings of the majority, and it is genuinely arrived at through discussion, that you feel that that has to be accepted. That's a very strong point, and I haven't really made a firm decision about this issue, but I do like that way of looking at it. I would only add that I feel that that discussion has to include the people under consideration. It can't just be a nontranssexual people deciding the fate of transsexual people because that's not a discussion, that's arbitrary. What I don't agree with is a definition that says, "My definition of woman requires that you can't be one." I can say that my definition is different than yours, but I can't say to someone else that you don't have a right to call yourself a woman.

**Davina**: Right, but would you agree that someone has the right to tell you that *woman* means this in this space, even if that doesn't include you?

**Rachel**: Well, sure, they can say that. But can they enforce it?

**Davina**: Well, sure, why shouldn't they? Why shouldn't they be able to say "*Woman* means this is in this space," and have the right to enforce that?

**Rachel**: I don't think I contested that for a moment. What I and a lot of other people contest, particularly about the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, is the statement that it's for all women. Last year I remember seeing an ad for the Separatist Convention. It said "This is a gathering for separatist lesbians only, and this excludes transsexuals and it excludes S&M women." I have no problem with that at all. I see no reason they shouldn't do that; to me that's fine. The issue is not saying that people can't be excluded. The issue is labelling those people. Plus there's the issue of, as you say, whether or not it genuinely represents a majority decision. But there is also this thorny question that arises with, say, white groups excluding black groups, or all male schools excluding women. Do the people who have the network in place have the right to bar it to minorities, who then can not take part in that network? Certainly the finding has been over the past thirty years in this country, there is a general consensus that the people who have the power network in place -- men as opposed to women; whites as opposed to blacks -- do not have that right. Now the issue becomes who is the privileged person. The people who attack transsexual women say, "Well, they have this male privilege." My answer to that is, "It's the people who decide the question who have the privilege." It's the people who get to vote on it who have the privilege, and clearly, to my mind, nontranssexual women are in a position stronger than transsexual women, whatever the transsexual woman's upbringing. I can understand the argument that if transsexual women are brought up as men that they assume that certain things are available to them. I don't know that that's necessarily true. I think it's not particularly, but even if it were true, I still think that you have to look at the circumstances of the person's life right now, and say "Who is it that has privilege?"

**Davina**: You say that "there can be few rights more central to a person's life than the right to self-definition." So do you think that the right to self-definition is absolute, that people have the right to define themselves in any way whatsoever, and that there are essentially no limits to the right of self-definition?

**Rachel**: I think that people have the right to define themselves in any way that they want, but I don't think that they have the right to behave in any way that they want.

**Davina**: But does the right of self-definition necessarily include the obligation that others accept that self-definition?

**Rachel**: No, I don't think so, no. How can it? How can you command other people to accept your definition of yourself?

**Davina**: What about when individual self-definition comes into conflict with group self-definition? Should the right to individual self-definition take precedence over the right to group self-definition?

**Rachel**: I'm not sure that that's the case. Let's take the most extreme example. Would you say that the Aryan Movement in Germany had the right for their group definition of the Jews as subhuman to take precedence over the Jews' definition of themselves as human beings?

**Davina**: In that case I would distinguish between the private realm and the public realm, and I'd say that, no, they don't have the right to do that in the public realm, but that they do have the right to do it within their own private realm.

**Rachel**: But the question with Michigan is whether it is private or public.

**Davina**: I definitely consider it to be private; I don't think there's any question about that.

**Rachel**: But my understanding is that they present themselves as being a public event, as being for all women, worldwide, and also as being the world's premier cultural event for women.

**Davina**: Yes they do, but I think that once you say that it is for women only that that automatically puts it into the private realm, because in the public realm there can be no discrimination based on sex at all. So to say that Michigan is a public event would mean that they could not exclude men.

**Rachel**: I think you have to look at what makes something public and what makes something private, and then you can bring those distinctions into play -- where discrimination is allowed and where it's not allowed.

**Davina**: Well, I think that when you say it's for one specific group of people, even a group as large as women, then you're automatically taking it out of the public realm.

**Rachel**: Then why weren't Southern schools not allowed to keep their schools all white?

**Davina**: Private schools *are* still allowed to do that; they just can't receive government funding if they do that, but they still can legally do that.

**Rachel**: But there were an awful lot of restaurants and bars that didn't want to that were forced to admit black people and women.

**Davina**: Yes, but those kinds of establishments are legally defined as public accommodations because they do operate within the public realm, but a private club can still definitely discriminate against whomever it wants to.

**Rachel**: I thought that that's been questioned, that some black people and women have challenged the right of private clubs to discriminate against them.

**Davina**: Yes, they have; but the question of whether or not they're truly operating only in the private realm, or whether

they're really operating within the public realm, has been the basis on which those challenges have been made.

**Rachel**: My own personal feeling is that I don't want to go where I'm not wanted, so I have no desire to push myself onto some women's space that doesn't want transsexual women, but my issue is with their claim that they have the right to say that transsexual women are men. That's the point that I'm in argument with.

**Davina**: Also in "Transsexual Rights and Others," you say "Kate Bornstein defines violence as 'a nonconsensual act upon someone's space or person,' and considers it violent when transsexual lesbians expect admission at lesbian activities and groups. With all respect to Kate . . . violence is what happens when someone beats you up." Kate has since clarified that what she was saying there was that it is violence for transsexual women to demand entrance into any private space in which a majority of the women do not wish for them to be there. Do you agree with Kate on this?

**Rachel**: I don't agree that it is violence unless they break down the door or beat up people who don't want them there. You know, there's that famous scene in *Through the Looking Glass* where Humpty Dumpty says: "Words mean whatever I want them to mean." I just don't agree with that. I'm not going to single out Kate about that; lots of people do that. *Violence* is a word that has been bandied about a lot, particularly within the feminist community. The effect of that kind of usage is that it trivializes what the words actually refer to.

**Davina**: So then, what would you think about transsexual women going into a space where they know that the women there don't want them to be there? Would you consider that violence?

**Rachel**: I would certainly agree that it's an improper thing to do, but I don't think it would be violent. It would only be violent if there is some sort of physical activity that involves damage to property or people. But that's just a matter of the meaning of the word. I'm not saying that I disagree that it would be wrong to do that.

**Davina**: Are you in any way empathetic with the concerns of the nontranssexual feminist critics of transsexuality?

**Rachel**: I'm empathetic to the extent that I understand that it's a difficult thing to comprehend. I can understand that there are blocks to taking that leap of acceptance that other people can be who they say they are. I have a lot less sympathy for people who try to impose their beliefs on other people's lives and try to block people from living their lives in some way.

**Davina**: Also in your essay "Secrets," you describe your experiences in the 1970s in London of being frustrated at the lack of political consciousness among other transsexuals. I generally find myself still feeling exactly the same way even twenty years later. Do you think that things have changed all that much among transsexuals in that twenty years? Do you think that the level of feminist consciousness is significantly higher than what it was back then or not?

**Rachel**: Oh, yea, I think it is. You have *TransSisters*. You have groups like Transgender Nation which have a political point of view. There was nothing like that at all twenty years ago, and not only did it not exist, no one even conceived of it.

**Davina**: I think that it is undeniable that there is a great deal more of an activist consciousness among transsexuals than there was twenty years ago, but I don't think that activism is necessarily feminist in nature. There have been plenty of activist movements that have been overtly antifeminist in nature, and even among a lot of the activist transsexuals I still see a great deal of a kind of consciousness that I would not consider to be feminist. What are your feelings on this?

**Rachel**: I see your point. What I missed most at that time was not so much activism or even really feminism in a strict sense, but just consciousness raising, which to me is feminism -- where you look at your life in a political context with other people. And that, to some extent, is still missing. It's certainly true that a lot of activism does not necessarily have feminist consciousness. But I think that *TransSisters* represents a real step in that direction because there is a dialogue going on about what this is all about, which to me has that kind of feminist approach. When you say *feminist*, what do you mean by feminism?

**Davina**: I don't think I could put feminism into a few words, but the kind of activism that I see that I don't consider to be feminist is a very kind of angry, confrontational, belligerent kind of activism, and that's mainly the kind of activism I see among transsexuals.

**Rachel**: It's funny you should say that because some of the angriest, nastiest, most belligerent people I have met in my life were people who claimed to be radical feminists.

**Davina**: Yes, that's true; I can't deny that. There are definitely anti-feminist tendencies even within the feminist movement, for sure. Unfortunately, it seems to me that those are the tendencies that transsexual activism seems to be emulating. So how do we as transsexual feminists address the lack of feminist consciousness among transsexuals?

**Rachel**: I would say that we need to raise transsexual consciousness, but to do it in a feminist way, which is an equality of sharing and a respect for each person's life history. But I think that if we said, "This is going to be feminist consciousness," that people would look at it in a different way. They'd be looking at that word.

**Davina**: Yes, the word has become very tainted, unfortunately.

**Rachel**: We'd be arguing, "What does *feminist* mean?" rather than saying, "What does it mean to be conscious as a transsexual?"

**Davina**: Why do you think that there is still such a lack of feminist consciousness among transsexuals?

**Rachel**: I'm not even sure that I agree that there is. I know I meet an awful lot of transsexual women who seem very feminist and would call themselves feminists, so I'm not sure I agree with you entirely. Possibly, to the extent that that is true, there's the lack of access to feminist experience for some people. For women who are transsexual, as well as for women who are not transsexual, gaining feminist consciousness takes some years. Women grow up without having that kind of consciousness generally. It has to be developed in groups with other people. If you look at the general population, the number of women who

have feminist consciousness is small, very small. There's a large group of women who are feminist to the extent of believing women should be equal; that women shouldn't be sexually harassed; that women should get equal pay and so on, but I don't think that's what you mean by feminist consciousness.

**Davina**: That's a very rudimentary kind of feminist consciousness, but I think that there are still a lot of transsexuals who don't even think that. I still see a great deal of conformity to stereotypes among transsexuals.

**Rachel**: I don't particularly, but maybe I just see a select group of people; I don't know.

**Davina**: What do you think are some of the lessons that the transsexual feminist movement can learn from the larger feminist movement?

**Rachel**: I try to think of that, first of all, in terms of "What are the successes of the feminist movement?" Because it's best to learn from success, and there's two levels of success. One is we're talking about a way of looking at the world, and a way of sharing knowledge and of sharing experience, a way of trying to respect other people and trying to be inclusive. I think that's a very valuable thing to learn from the women's movement. And then, practically, I think it depends on analysis of how well the women's movement has done tactically.

**Davina**: Are we making any of the same mistakes that the larger feminist movement made?

**Rachel**: The one that comes to mind is the one that you were talking about before, of a kind of very aggressive activism that makes no room for dissent. I remember in London I had a friend who was a life-long lesbian, as opposed to what at that time was called, and still is called, "political lesbians," -- that is, women who came out as lesbians because they thought it was politically better than to be heterosexual. One time there was an action being planned to protest the Miss World Contest, and the women were very gung-ho about the action, which was very confrontational, very aggressive. My friend, who very rarely spoke said, "To me the only result of this action is going to be humiliating those women who are contestants. To me it's just a way of humiliating other women and not getting anything back for it." As soon as it became clear that she was trying to say something that was not what everyone else was saying, people literally started shouting at her to shut up. This was absolutely appalling. This is the kind of thing that we don't want to do. We don't see that yet, but what we certainly do seem to be seeing shaping up is a battle over what is a correct ideology, and it's getting personal and nasty.

**Davina**: Oh yea, I've definitely noticed that there is a real tendency to create a politically correct ideology within the transsexual movement, which I find very disturbing.

**Rachel**: What I think is really good that we've learned from the feminist movement is what was done at Michigan, particularly the first year after Nancy was thrown out. I think that was the year that you and Janis [Walworth] went there. There was a lot of outrage and a lot of talk about confrontation. I remember discussing things with someone -- very tactical kinds of things -- ways to get back at them. Everybody had various kinds of fantasies that I didn't take all that seriously, but that was the kind of thinking that was being done, by me and other people as well. So I was very impressed when you and Janis just went there in the spirit of openness and communication, because that was something that came from a clearly feminist viewpoint. I don't think that would have occurred to you to do it that way if you had not had been embedded in feminist awareness.

**Davina**: In your essay "Aphrodite: Transsexual Goddess of Passion," you stated: "It often has seemed to me, and to other transsexual women, that nontranssexuals will often go so far as to acknowledge, and genuinely accept, that I can be a woman just like them, but will balk at any suggestion that they think of themselves as somehow just like me." It seems to me that this statement could be interpreted to mean that you think that there aren't any differences between transsexual and nontranssexual women, that transsexual women are women in the very same way that nontranssexual women are women. Is this an accurate interpretation of your meaning?

**Rachel**: I can see where someone might think that from that, but that's certainly not what I meant. What I was talking about was empathy -- the ability to place oneself in the other person's position, and to feel what it is like to be that person. I felt that a lot of nontranssexual women are willing to accept that transsexual women can really be real women in the same way that they feel themselves to be, but if someone were to say to them, "How would you feel if you were transsexual?" they don't want to think about that.

**Davina**: In your essay "Abandonment to the Body's Desire," you say, "Part of the power of the cross-sexed blood rite of surgery is to take us fully over the line, so that as we experience our own wildness, and break down walls of official gender roles, we do so as females." Could you elaborate on that?

**Rachel**: I don't want to imply that someone who perceives herself fully as female can only do so if she has surgery because I don't believe that's true. What I do think is that there is this sense of finishing transition, however you achieve it. What I mean by that is when you start transition, you're coming out of an identity -- even if you don't believe it's real -- that has still been there all your life. I know for myself and for lots of people I meet, there's a sense of being part man and part woman and having blended these identities together, and for some people, that's exactly who they are. And for other people, it's exactly who they are to go beyond both male and female, and to strike out into new territory. But for those of us who do see ourselves as having an identity as female or male, it's an important step to fully inhabit that identity. Once you start breaking down the social rules of gender and you start really being wild and unconfined and explore whatever you're going to do, you do that as the person you really are. You do it as -- in my case -- a woman, saying, "I'm not going to be confined to what society says women are supposed to do," rather than as somebody male who says, "I'm not going to be confined to what society says men are supposed to do." That's a big jump, and for a lot of people, one of the aspects of surgery is that it completes that jump, although I have to be honest and say I felt that long before

I had surgery.

**Davina**: There are some persons now who choose to not undergo surgery who are making the claim that because transsexuals do choose to undergo surgery that they are not breaking down the walls of official gender roles and that they are in fact maintaining those walls. How would you respond to someone who says such a thing?

**Rachel**: I guess I would respond to it in the way I would respond to anyone who says that, because that's certainly not a new idea. It's certainly the same idea as that of radical feminists who attack transsexuality; it's the Janice Raymond concept. There's no question about it; it's exactly the same thing. I would say to anyone who raises that issue that it's fundamental to accept that all people's lives have validity, and people who seek surgery are not just tools or victims of somebody else. If we don't accept that, we are just taking on a kind of patriarchal superiority and saying, "Well, you don't know about your life, I know what the truth is about your life."

**Davina**: Yea, it seems very ironic to me that the transgenderist critics of transsexuality use the very same arguments of Janice Raymond, and even cite her to back up their claims, and she doesn't like them any more than she likes us.

**Rachel**: Among all kinds of marginalized groups, there is a strange belief that we all have that says that, "If I can distinguish myself from the other people who seem to be like me, and show that I'm not like them, then I'm okay." I'm always noticing this. The transvestites say, "Well, I'm not one of those gay men. I don't have sex with men. And I'm not one of those transsexuals. I don't want to cut my penis off. I just want to wear women's clothes. There's nothing wrong with that." And the homosexuals would say, "Well, I'm not one of those weird, kinky transvestites. I don't dress up like a woman. And I don't want to cut my penis off like those transsexuals. I'm a real man." And the transsexual women would say, "I not some frivolous crossdresser who's just taking on female stereotypes. I'm really serious. And I'm not one of these homosexuals. I'm a woman." Each of them seem to have the idea that someone in our society will say, "Oh, of course. You're okay. It's those other people I don't like," which clearly just doesn't happen.

**Davina**: But don't you think that we all do need our separate identities though?

**Rachel**: Yes, but not at the expense of somebody else. I remember at the Full Circle of Women, I was very disturbed to pick up one of those pamphlets that someone had left. She was proudly proclaiming her identity as a berdache, which is fine. But in the same article, she starts attacking transsexuals on much the same grounds that you're talking about, and I thought, "This is so sad. Why does she have to attack somebody else to claim her identity?" Clearly, she believes, with some accuracy obviously, that transsexual people have attacked her, that she has been put down and made to feel less for not having surgery, and I think that's a real shame. One of the things I'm trying to do in my writing is to find a way to celebrate surgery that does not imply that somebody else who doesn't have surgery is inferior. To the extent that people feel I'm putting down people who don't choose surgery, then I have to apologize and try harder.

**Davina**: In your poem "Many Things I Am Not and a Few Things I Am," you say that you are not courageous, and I understand that what you mean by this is that you are just being true to your identity. But doesn't it require a great deal of courage to be a transsexual and to be true to what one feels is one's true identity in this society? Isn't this a kind of false dichotomy between being courageous and being true to one's identity?

**Rachel**: Sure, but for some people, they obviously had no choice.

**Davina**: But even if they don't have any choice, don't you think it still requires a great deal of courage?

**Rachel**: Oh yea, sure. To some extent I was just being arch in that line because I was tired of hearing people say, "Oh, you must be so courageous." It really seemed to me that when people say, "Oh, you have such courage," what's behind it is that they're saying, "I wouldn't do that." But I know that may be unfair to people who were genuinely paying me a compliment.

**Davina**: What do you mean by the statement "I am the daughter of belief?"

**Rachel**: That my identity as a woman is based primarily on my believing it; it's not based on proof. So I am the creation of that belief which is so deep in me. I think in our society somehow an absolute belief is not trusted. You have to be able to prove things to other people. You can't just say, "This is who I am, and I know it's who I am." You have to be able to prove it to them or else they just dismiss it, and yet, it's the proof that becomes the trap because everybody has a different proof for what is a man and what is a woman. As soon as we fall into the trap of thinking that we are going to get other people to accept us and agree with us, then we just run around in circles. So what are you supposed to do? To me, the answer to that has been to stop worrying about whether people accept me as a woman or not.

**Davina**: What do you mean by the statement "I am the giver and receiver of gifts?"

**Rachel**: I think that to be transsexual is to be able to receive a great gift. We're able to experience things in ways that other people don't. We're able to go through an overwhelming transformation; and I guess I'm one of those people who believe that intensity of experience is of value in and of itself. We're able to discover all kinds of things about life that other people don't discover because they're not challenged to discover them. We get to give a lot of those gifts to other people, such as the gift of saying what the distinctions are between gender identity, anatomical sex, sexual behavior and sexual preference, all of

***"As soon as we fall into the trap of thinking that we are going to get other people to accept us and agree with us, then we just run around in circles. So what are we supposed to do? To me, the answer to that has been to stop worrying about whether people accept me as a woman or not."***

which are based on different things that people confuse together. Transsexual people are in a great position to be able to see what the differences are. On a deeper level, we can provide the gift of being an example of people who have not fallen into shame or doubt or fear, but who have followed through on their desires. That's a great gift to give to other people.

**Davina**: What do you mean by the statement "I am constant desire?"

**Rachel**: That's followed by the line, "I am steady fulfillment," and I think they have to go together. What I mean by that is that there is a constant sense of wanting to realize that inner sense of who you are, to realize what it means to you to be a woman or what it means to you to be a man. So there's a desire to always be experiencing, "What is this about?" and "Who am I?" and "What is this strange belief, this deep down conviction that I have?" And the fulfillment is that as you live your life you are making those discoveries all the time.

**Davina**: In that same poem, you say that you are not trapped in anybody's body. This would seem to me to contradict your assertion that the desire to change sex is a form of abandonment to the body's desire. How do you reconcile these statements?

**Rachel**: I think they're totally the same. I think that if I thought that I was a woman trapped in a man's body then the body would be irrelevant to me, and I feel -- and this is a kind of mystical statement, and I realize that it's going to sound a bit murky to people -- but I feel that the body itself desires to change. I feel that the desire of transsexuality is not a desire that's in the mind and detached from the body. I feel that it almost goes down to the cellular level, and there's this need in the body to transform itself. It's hard to explain in any clearer terms than that. My reason for saying that is that's the way I experienced it. I experienced that sense of being a woman, and that sense of the need to take on a woman's identity in the world as something that came from the deepest place of who I was, and to me, the deepest place of who I am is really in the body because the body is the reality.

**Davina**: But if your body is telling you that it wants to change, isn't it in a sense telling you that your body is wrong?

**Rachel**: I don't think so. Let me characterize one view of transsexuality: there are real men and real women and and we are trapped in the bodies of men and want to be women, so we have to change to an approximation of that. But let's say there is such a thing as a transsexual body. That is the body that goes through physical transformation from a male form to a female form, or from female to male. Then change is an aspect of a transsexual body. You see, I'll agree with someone like Kate Bornstein who will say that this is a particular kind of experience, and that transsexual women are not the same as nontranssexual women. I won't agree that that means that we're not women if that's who we believe we are. I don't doubt for a second that what Kate says is true. When Kate says she knew she was not a man, and she discovered she was not a woman, that's an absolute truth. I just don't think it's true of everybody. In fact, I never felt particularly that I wasn't a man. That was never my attitude. My attitude was that there was something about me that I don't understand, and when I looked at it and said, "Okay, I'm going to surrender to it. I will see what it is." What it is turned out to be that I am a woman.

**Davina**: You say that to the best of your knowledge the "trapped in the wrong body" metaphor was coined by Harry Benjamin. Don't you think that it is possible that he could have gotten that metaphor from transsexuals themselves?

**Rachel**: Possibly, sure. I don't know.

**Davina**: Do you think that this is a valid metaphor for some people?

**Rachel**: I would imagine so, if it seems to them to be valid. So then I guess I would have to say yes, it is.

**Davina**: You also say that you are not a sex change. Do you mean by this that you don't consider that you changed sex?

**Rachel**: I guess that what I mean by that is that there is no miraculous doctor's transformation from a man to a woman, that I am simply who I am. I also say that "I am not male-to-female." What I mean by that is that I perceived myself and felt myself to be a woman before surgery and after surgery, so there's not a change of sex that is miraculously performed by scalpel.

**Davina**: What was it that made you female before surgery?

**Rachel**: This is a really hard question because what it was was some kind of sense in myself that was not particularly connected to outer qualities. It clearly wasn't connected to my body shape, and it wasn't particularly connected to my behavior. Interestingly, when I look back now to some of my behavior as a child, it is surprising to me to see what extent I was unconsciously trying to act in the world as a little girl without knowing it and not knowing what was wrong. I didn't have the outer signs of playing with dolls or hanging out with girls all the time, and having no friends who were boys. My favorite games were games with cap guns and adventure fantasies. But recently I was reading Deborah Tannen's book about men and women communicating, and she described the way boys communicate and the way girls communicate; and the way that girls communicate is an exact description of the way that I tried to communicate, but I was trying to do it with boys because that's what I was supposed to do, and it didn't work. I didn't know why it didn't work. I didn't know why I was so lonely. But none of that was in my consciousness when I said to myself, "I am a woman." That was a self-discovery that was not connected to any particular proof. It was an existential statement.

**Davina**: But isn't this saying that there are specific psychological and emotional qualities that constitute femaleness?

**Rachel**: I'm not sure that it is; it certainly wasn't at the time. I would describe it as the opposite; for me, the sense of "I am a woman," or "I am a man" is something very deep and is not connected to one trait or another.

**Davina**: Right. So doesn't that mean that being a man or a woman is totally independent of having any particular psychological or emotional qualities?

**Rachel**: Yes; I was referring to the thing about communication in childhood as just an interesting discovery that I made very recently. I wasn't trying to imply that that's what made me female; just the opposite. There's nothing particularly that makes

one female or male, other than one's awareness of that.

**Davina**: But what constitutes that awareness? That's what I'm trying to figure out. Whenever I have asked any transsexual woman who claimed to be female before having surgery exactly what it was about herself that made her female, no one has ever been able to give me an answer to that.

**Rachel**: It depends on what the word *female* means. If you're going to define it as having a female body shape, then obviously there's no question there. Some people define it as having certain characteristics. I would tend to disagree. I would say they're confusing the category *female* with the category *feminine*. I would say that it is something that is very pure that can't be put to any kind of proof. I know that sounds very wishy-washy and very mystical, but unfortunately it's hard to pin down more than that.

**Davina**: The problem that I have with saying that I was female before surgery is that I can look back on my life and see ways in which I was more like girls than I was like boys, but then if I say that that made me female, that seems to me that I'm saying that those psychological characteristics that I shared with most girls are intrinsic to femaleness, which is not something that I believe.

**Rachel**: No, of course not. That's what I meant about confusing *female* with *feminine*. But, then, can I ask you, why did you have surgery?

**Davina**: Well, basically because I hated my genitals. I really felt like I was in the wrong body. I can't really think of a better metaphor than that, but at the same time, I realize that that is only a metaphor. I realize that that metaphor wasn't *literally* true.

**Rachel**: It sounds to me that you felt that your body was wrong because you felt yourself to be a woman. Is that not right?

**Davina**: When I look back on it, and I examine it honestly, I don't really feel that I can say that I felt that I was a woman already; I can't honestly say that. When I look at that feeling honestly, and really try to examine just what that feeling consisted of, the only thing that I feel that I can honestly say about it is that I very intensely *desired to be* a woman, that I was even almost obsessed with being a woman. But, no, I can't honestly say that I felt like I was already a woman. My experience was very much one of very intensely desiring to be something that I knew that I was not.

**Rachel**: I guess what I am suggesting is that that desire to be comes from some sense of believing that that's who you should be, that in a sense, that's who you really are.

**Davina**: I can agree with that, but only to an extent. I did feel a very intense feeling that I should be a girl, and a lot of people actually told me that very thing, but I don't believe that the feeling that one should be something makes one already that which one feels one should be. In fact, the situation would seem to imply just the opposite, that by saying that one should be something, that one is in fact acknowledging that one is not that already.

**Rachel**: I think there is a difference between a certain kind of transsexual person for whom the genitals are primary, and another kind for whom the life experience is more important, and the genitals are just something that they want to be in accord with that life experience, but they don't feel it's their primary focus. I think that's part of why there's a conflict in the community, because a lot of people don't realize that sometimes there are cross-purposes in the dialogue. Clearly there are those people for whom the experience of the genitals is absolutely what matters, and they know that from early childhood. But I know for myself, I certainly didn't feel that way. I didn't grow up with that kind of sense. I grew up with a very strong sense of a pull towards a female identity, but not centered on my body *per se*.

**Davina**: In the afterward of the paperback edition of her book, *Gender Outlaw*, Kate Bornstein makes a distinction between *having* an identity and *being* an identity. It seems to me that what you are saying is that there is no difference, that to have a particular identity is the same as being that which one identifies with. Is that a correct interpretation of what you're saying?

**Rachel**: Well, I think that in an absolute sense -- in a Buddhist sense -- I would agree with Kate; that you can detach from all of your identities. There's an exercise I sometimes do when I teach Tarot classes. It's a Fool exercise in which I just keep peeling off layers of what people believe they are until they become nothing, and then even that sense of being nothing is stripped away, and they're left with genuine nothingness. So in that absolute sense, I agree. However, I don't think that that means that identities that we have or that we are are meaningless or empty.

**Davina**: But is it possible for someone to identify as something that he or she is not?

**Rachel**: I'm not sure. I know that the reason I have this position is from my own experience. All my life I had a desire to take on female things, and I was very scared of that desire. Finally I said to myself that I can't go on without addressing this fear. My greatest fear was that I would find out I wanted to be a woman. I decided to stop being afraid, and I looked at it. I opened up my emotions as best as I could and what came out overwhelmingly was not that I wanted to be a woman, but that I *am* a woman. So my making that statement is not a question of trying to prove a point; it was a question of being true to what was the reality for me.

**Davina**: The problem I have with that is that is seems to me to presuppose that there is an absolute definition of *woman*; that there is this quality that comprises *womanness* that exists outside of the various societal definitions of *woman* that have existed throughout history, and no one has been able to tell me what that definition is.

**Rachel**: Maybe it does presuppose that; I don't know, but what I'm saying is that, as stated by me, I do not mean it as a proof of anything, but simply as an emotion, or rather a truth that I'm discovering at a very deep level.

**Davina**: But how is that any different than saying that you had a deep desire to be a woman?

**Rachel**: All I can say is that that's not how I experienced it. I didn't experience it as desire; I experienced it as self-knowledge.

**Davina**: So, what would you say to someone like me, for whom my experience as a transsexual was profoundly one of identifying as something that I knew that I was not, that the

conflict between identity and being was central to my experience as a transsexual, and that I underwent surgery to reconcile that conflict?

**Davina Anne Gabriel and Rachel Pollack**
photo by Fran Windler

**Rachel**: What I would have to say about that is I think it's your truth. You and others who feel that way are providing another aspect of transsexual experience. What we're both demonstrating is that transsexual experience is not monolithic. I think that the sooner we all start to look at that, and accept that, then the happier we'll all be.

**Davina**: Okay, I guess what I'm really getting at is this: *How* did you know that you were *already* a woman? Precisely *what* did that knowledge consist of? How did that knowledge differ from or consist of anything other than a very intense desire to be a woman? Exactly what was it about that identity that differentiated it from a man's identity if it didn't consist of identifying with any particular body type or any type of psychological or emotional qualities or any type of gender role?

**Rachel**: I can't really give you an answer. All I can say is that it had a quality of revelation about it.

**Davina**: This is the problem I have with transsexual women who say that they were women all along. None of them have been able to give me an answer to how they knew that or what that knowledge consisted of other than just to say it was an inner conviction.

**Rachel**: I don't think that it's something that would apply to everyone, but I think at least to some people, to many people, not just transsexual people, the sense of being male or female or being a woman or a man, is a basic identity. "I am this thing." After that comes the question of, "What does it mean to be this thing?" For nontranssexual people who have that basic kind of identity, they don't know they have it because it's never questioned. This is one of the gifts that nontranssexual people can give. What I'm saying is that some people have this kind of basic identity, and other things come out of that, rather than the identity coming out of the other things. A lot of transsexual people say, "Well, it must be right for me to be a woman or a man because I did such and such as a child," or "because I prefer this kind of clothes." Transsexual women in particular will say "I much prefer women's clothes to men's."

**Davina**: But if you say that you knew you were a woman all along, isn't that presupposing that what you were feeling is the same thing that nontranssexual women are feeling? How do you know that what you were feeling is the same thing that nontranssexual women are feeling?

**Rachel**: I wouldn't presuppose that. I think possibly when I first came out that I tried to make that claim. I know that I was trying to point out similarities between myself and nontranssexual women in ways of being in the world. But at this point I don't think that I would try to make that claim. Ultimately, we cannot know what someone else is feeling except by what they tell us and show us. But we can know what we ourselves are feeling. And that's where we all have to begin. And it's also the ground from which we can reach out and share our lives and discoveries with other people.

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*Godmother Night.* (a contemporary novel inspired by Grimm's Fairy Tales; to be published in 1996)

Rachel Pollack's books have been translated into Dutch, German, French, Spanish, Danish, Italian and Portuguese.

## Critical Acclaim for the Works of Rachel Pollack

*Unquenchable Fire* is the winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award for best science-fiction novel of the year in Britain. *The New York Review of Science Fiction* described it as "not only the best fantasy of the year, possibly the best of the decade, and the best feminist novel of the decade."

*Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom* has been described as "a classic" and "the Bible" of modern Tarot interpretation. Its marriage of common sense, wide-ranging knowledge, and esoteric awareness have inspired over 200,000 readers worldwide to a deeper knowledge of the Tarot.

*Temporary Agency* was nominated for the Nebula Award and the James T. Tiptree Award. Described by Michael Swanwick as "the real thing, a shot straight from the Jungian depths, and the single most gripping book I've read this year."

*The New Tarot* was described by *Dimensions* magazine as "possibly the best book ever written about the history of the Tarot."

About the *Shining Woman Tarot* Caitlin Matthews wrote, "The deeper levels of creation run through this pack, with a delightful freedom and wise love." *Tarot Network News* described it as "the crowning jewel in the Tarot diadem of geocentric shamanism."

## Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss

*(continued from page 30)*

approved by a committee. With only a few days before the scheduled committee vote, we were delivered the news that if transsexuality were included in the definition of sexual orientation that the ordinance would definitely not have sufficient votes to send it to the full City Council, but that we would definitely have the necessary votes to do so if it were not included.

There was absolutely no question about this; it was a political reality which we all knew with absolute certainty. None of us questioned that this was in fact the case. So we were faced with the choice of leaving transsexuality in the definition of sexual orientation and sending the bill to certain defeat, or removing it and allowing the legislation to proceed to the full City Council, where it stood a good chance of passage. I had absolutely no difficulty deciding what the right thing to do in that situation was. I voted to drop transsexuality from the definition; and I would do so again without the slightest hesitation. Moreover, I continued to work for passage of that ordinance even after transsexuality was removed, and just as hard as before. I am not about to demand that someone else give up a chance to achieve their rights for my sake; that would be like lesbians trying to sabotage the ERA because it didn't prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Yet advocates of preop MTF inclusion at MWMF are presently demanding exactly that of postops. By demanding of postops that they also advocate preop inclusion, they are in effect saying, "If I can't get into this festival, then I am going to make sure that you don't get in either," because the fact of the matter is that advocacy for preop inclusion will inevitably result in *neither* preop or postop transsexuals being allowed to attend that festival. This is something that we know with absolute certainty; it is a political reality about which there is absolutely no question whatsoever.

I have no problem with preop MTF transsexuals and their supporters camping out outside the festival and trying to persuade festigoers that they should also be allowed to attend it. They are certainly within their rights to do so. However, they have absolutely no moral right to enter the festival against the consent of the majority of the women there.

Moreover, if preop MTF transsexuals hope to ever be able to attend that festival, their best hope of accomplishing that is to not sabotage the chances of postops being allowed to attend it because if that were to happen, then we can both kiss goodbye whatever chance ever existed for either one of us to be allowed to do so.

*Davina Anne Gabriel is a forty-two year-old, sweet sixteen years postoperative transsexual lesbian feminist Witch, the founder, editor and publisher of* ***TransSisters: the Journal of Transsexual Feminism,*** *a former editor of two queer newspapers in Kansas City, Missouri, and a long time activist for queer, feminist, transsexual and other causes. She has been involved, for all three years of its existence, in the protest against the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's "womyn born womyn" only policy and was one of four transsexual lesbians expelled from that festival for defying that policy in 1993. She lives in Kansas City, Missouri.*

**Davina Anne Gabriel**
photo by Fran Windler

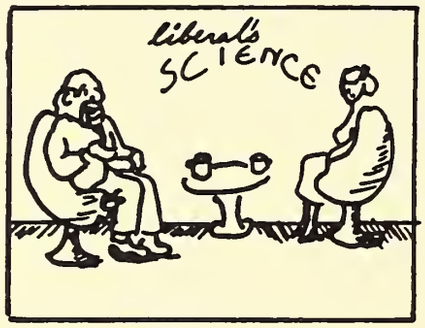
# the CURE

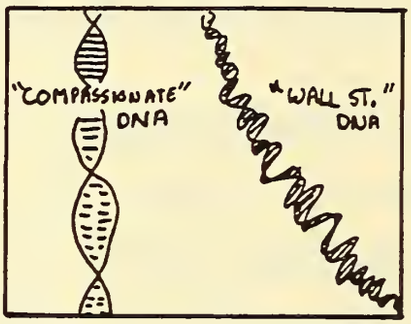
a cautionary tale

by Diana Green

HELLO. I'M WALRUS CRONKHYTE, AND THIS IS "LIBERAL'S SCIENCE." WE'RE HERE WITH DR. FERN ZYGOTE, TRANSSEXUAL ACTIVIST AND RESEARCHER. DOCTOR, YOU SAY YOU CAN CURE REPUBLICANISM?

YES, WALRUS. BY DISSECTING THE BRAINS OF THE RICH, WE'VE ISOLATED A CHEMICAL THAT BLOCKS COMPASSION SYNAPSES ANY TIME THE WORDS "MONEY" OR "FUNDING" APPEAR IN ANY CONTEXT. THIS IS A SYMPTOM OF A MISSING GENE WHICH MAKES THE VICTIM'S DNA RESEMBLE A 1929 STOCK CHART.

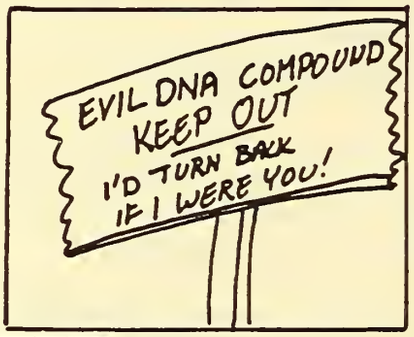





SO IT'S GENETIC?
YES, QUITE.
IS THERE REALLY A CURE?
WELL, WE CAN CURE IT WITH GENE SPLICING, BUT-

BUT?
WELL, THIS IS A STICKY POINT. SINCE THEIR DNA IS DIFFERENT, WE NOW HAVE SCIENTIFIC PROOF THAT MEAN, SELFISH PEOPLE REALLY AREN'T HUMAN.

ONE IDEA HAS BEEN TO ISOLATE THE SPECIES AND LET IT DIE OFF. EVENTUALLY THEY'LL FEED ON EACH OTHER, AND INBREEDING SUCH FLAWED DNA WILL CREATE A GENE POOL UNABLE TO SUSTAIN ITSELF.




ONCE THESE PITIFUL CREATURES CAN NO LONGER HARM US, WE CAN ENSURE THE SAFETY OF ALL MY TRANSSEXUAL SIBLINGS. AFTER THAT, RACISM, SEXISM, AND POVERTY CAN BE EASILY ELIMINATED. AND WE MAY EVEN END THE TRAGEDY OF ALLERGIES TO CHOCOLATE!

liberal's
SCIENCE

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THANK YOU, DR. ZYGOTE.
JOIN US NEXT WEEK, WHEN "LIBERAL'S SCIENCE" LOOKS AT THE TRAGEDY OF HUMANS WITHOUT TAILS, AND THE PLIGHT OF THE MONO-SEXED!
THIS IS WALRUS CRONKHYTE, SAYING GOOD NIGHT AND GOOD NERDS.

**Diana Green**
photo by Pauline Johnson

*Diana Green is a forty-one year old, six years postoperative bisexual woman and a resident of Minneapolis, Minnesota. During her commercial art education, she was an apprentice to Reed Waller, creator of* ***Omaha, the Cat Dancer.*** *Her writings, illustrations and cartoons have appeared in* ***Animania, The Madison Edge, Feminist Voices, Gaze*** *and* ***Gay Comics.***

# Get Submissive!

*TransSisters* welcomes submissions of original articles, interviews, reviews, position statements, press releases, editorials, research reports, fiction, poetry, artwork or photography dealing with issues of transsexuality and feminism. Submissions dealing with controversial issues or taking controversial stances (short of character assassination) including erotica are especially encouraged. Although the primary focus of *TransSisters* is on issues of concern to male-to-female transsexuals, material related to female-to-male concerns will also be considered for publication. Material that has been published elsewhere is also acceptable, but please indicate where it has been previously published if it has been.

All submissions are subject to editing by the Domineditrix. Please enclose a brief biographical summary (two or three sentences) with your submission. Submissions written under pseudonyms are acceptable.

*TransSisters* reserves the right to reprint all submissions. All other rights revert to the individual authors after publication.

*TransSisters* also reserves the right to refuse publication of any submissions which do not meet our editorial or aesthetic standards or which are contrary to our goals and purposes.

Manuscripts should be double-spaced or neatly hand written. Please number your pages and put your name and the title of the work at the top of every page. Please submitt your work on 3.5 floppy disks in either Macintosh or DOS ASCII formats if at all possible.

Artwork must be camera ready. Please enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope if you want your manuscript, disk or artwork returned.

Contributors are also welcome and encouraged to submit photographs (preferably black & white) of themselves along with their submissions, but please indicate the name of the photographer if you do so, so that we can give proper photo credit. Negatives are also acceptable in lieu of prints, and will be returned if you provide a s.a.s.e.

The deadline for submissions of all sorts is six weeks prior to publication of the next issue. Those dates are as follows: Winter: November 20; Spring: February 18; Summer: May 20; Autumn: August 20.

Contributors receive a free copy of the issue in which their work appears. Please address all submissions to: *TransSisters*; Davina Anne Gabriel, editor; 4004 Troost Avenue; Kansas City, Missouri 64110. Submissions can also be sent by fax to (816)753-7816, but you must call first, as there must be someone here to receive your fax.


I am not aware of anyone else- including me- who is integrating a real sense of transsexualism, and an understanding of it, into comics work. I would love to see you do lots more...Your characters...already "breathe" for me,by which I mean, they seem to have a real sense of being independent and alive, not just a flat attempt to create characters who never rise above the paper.
KATHERINE COLLINS
Creator/artist of
NEIL THE HORSE

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That Kind of poignant and revealing writing is missing from the transsexual press and I hope you continue with it.
GAIL SONDEGAARD
Editor,
TRANSSEXUAL
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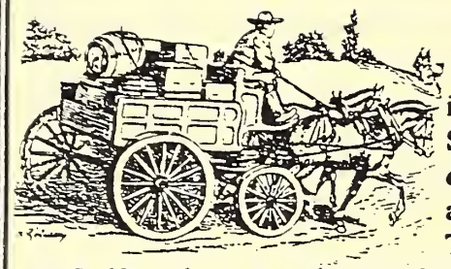

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If you have recently moved or are planning to move to another address in the near future, it is very important that you notify *TransSisters* about your change of address as soon as possible. Since the United State Postal Service does *not* forward fourth class mail, ***even if you have filed a change of address form*** with the Post Office, your subscription copy will be returned to us, postage due, causing us an unnecessary expense if you do not notify us of your change of address. This also will greatly delay your receiving your subscription copy since we have to re-mail it.

So if you have recently moved or are planning on moving in the near future, please take the time to fill out the change of address form below and to return it to *TransSisters* immediately. Thanks in advance for your cooperation!

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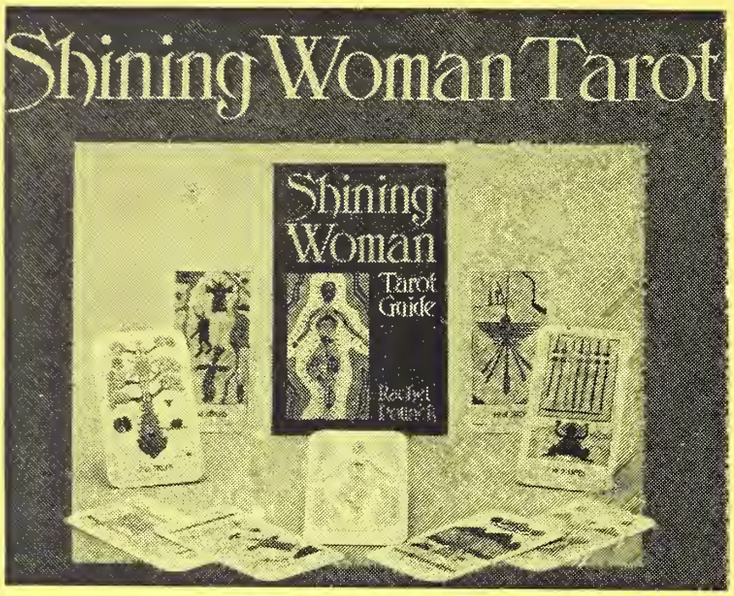


*Shining Woman Tarot* is a sacred divination pack, awakening in the reader a sense of spiritual power and beauty. It is the result of decades of work with the Tarot, myth, dreams and the spiritual realities of the imagination. Its roots are in traditional Tarot, but it is also a radical departure.

The images, painted by the author herself, are drawn from many cultures and traditions, ranging over six continents and tens of thousands of years. The names and symbolism of the major and minor Arcana have been amended to reflect this -- the four suits are Trees, Rivers, Birds and Stones, while the Court cards are now Place, Knower, Gift and Speaker.

Unique in its linking of the Tarot to tribal and prehistoric art, *Shining Woman Tarot* opens up many new possibilities for the use of the Tarot today, and provides a valuable tool for personal development.

Rachel Pollack has worked with the Tarot for over twenty years and has written many books on the subject, including *Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom* and *The New Tarot*. Her work has received wide praise for its innovative and sensitive approach to the Tarot.

"This work is about bringing the sacred into daily life. It calls attention to the awe surrounding us. Its lack of sexism is appreciated -- and the art grows on you. The *Shining Woman* tarot is a tool worth having." -- Melissa Ellen Penn, *Green Egg*

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